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DID PAUL KNOW OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH?

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DID PAUL KNOW OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH?

AN HISTORICAL STUDY

By

THE REV. BISHOP RICHARD J. COOKE, D.D., L.H.D.

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TO THE REVEREND BISHOP
Adna Wright Leonard, D.D., S.T.D.
Wise Administrator and
Faithful Preacher
of the Word

PREFACE

Of the many problems which arise in a critical study of the New Testament the silence of St. Paul and other New Testament writers concerning the virgin birth of our Lord is not the least perplexing. From the very first the virgin birth was one of those many questions which created division in the primitive Church, and at the present time it is the occasion of much questioning, not only among biblical scholars, and by the scientific mind in general, but also among many Christian believers whose belief in the Lord Jesus as the Son of God does not depend upon their conception of the mode of his entrance into human history.

In the literature of the subject it is generally assumed that the silence of St. Paul, of St. John, of St. James and other New Testament writers, like Mark and Jude, is unanswerable proof that the fact of the virgin birth was unknown to the first generation of Christians. For, with the exception of two evangelists out of the four, Matthew and Luke, there is no mention of such an extraordinary event as is related by these writers in the entire New Testament.

Typical of these statements is the following: "The virgin birth was apparently unknown to the primitive Church, for the earliest New Testament writers make no mention of it. Paul's letters do not allude to it, neither does the Gospel of Mark. The Fourth Gospel, although written much later, ignores the belief in the virgin birth." Thus also numerous other monographs and encyclopedias: "That which is unknown to the teachings of St. Paul, St. John and St. James and our Lord himself and is absent

from the earliest and latest Gospels, cannot be so essential as many people have supposed."

A recent writer in a monograph of marked worth says:

> Viewing the passages [citations from Paul's Epistles] as a whole we must conclude that not only is St. Paul completely silent as to the virgin birth but that he is silent just where his silence is most difficult to understand; if he knew of the traditions. . . . They [Paul's Epistles] permit us to appreciate how much St. Paul knew of the words and deeds of Jesus and the events of his earthly life. That they reveal no knowledge of the virgin birth is hardly to be explained by a policy of silence. Unless on other grounds it can be shown that the tradition was known in apostolic circles during St. Paul's lifetime, his silence must be interpreted to mean lack of knowledge concerning it.[1]

Thus it seems that the question whether New Testament writers knew of the virgin birth is really of much more importance than is generally supposed, not only with reference to doctrine, but also as to the credibility of the record in the First and Third Gospels. The apostle Paul builds a Christology apparently without any knowledge of the facts recorded by Matthew and Luke, and many sincere ministers of the Word at the present time, in whose thinking this subject has large place, believing that the Incarnation of the Son of God was not conditioned by the manner in which it was realized, are confirmed in this belief by the silence of the apostle. This attitude is not without effect also upon those who deny the divine nature of Jesus Christ, regarding Him in all respects as solely human, yet superior to all men because of his nearness to

[1] Vincent Taylor, *The Historical Evidence for the Virgin Birth.*

God. It is easier to think of Him as purely human, and that his birth was solely of human origin, than it is to conceive of the Infinite coming into time and space.

Others seem to think that if the Lord Jesus is reduced to the common level of humanity it makes approach to his likeness much easier, ignoring the new problem which immediately arises, namely, how such a purely human being could have arisen at all out of the soil of humanity. The ages before Him never produced such a man, nor have the ages since.

To many others it is important to know whether the apostles who preached a gospel which historically was based upon facts, as they affirmed, did really know that the Christ they preached came into the world in the way that the evangelists, Matthew and Luke, who wrote his life, declared He did, that is, in a supernatural manner. Students of history have long since learned that there is a distinction between historical facts and the manner of stating those facts, and that in answer to the question, what is history? one might well reply, that depends on who writes it.

To the average reader of the Scriptures it seems very plain that if the virgin birth was the faith of the primitive Church in Jerusalem, if the narratives of that birth were contained in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke at that time, that is, before the destruction of Jerusalem, then it becomes the strangest of the strange, a problem without solution, that no trace, not even the slightest, of such knowledge should be found in the writings of any of the apostles, the first teachers of the Church.

Nor will it satisfy the inquiring mind to fall back upon the argument from silence unless some reason is given for the silence. Not every argument from silence is a valid argument. In any case, silence proves nothing. Certainly it does not prove that an event which is not mentioned did

really occur. On the other hand, silence is no proof that the affair never happened.

But here the case is different. We have in this instance not one writer only but several, and all living at the same time, in the same country, and all intensely engaged in the same calling of preaching the same Person, his life, his teachings, his death and resurrection, preaching concerning one whom they believed to be the Son of God who became incarnate for the redemption of the race; and yet not one of these writers gives the slightest hint that he has any knowledge of the supernatural character of the birth of Him whom they preached.

The importance of the subject is apparent moreover from the viewpoint of the reliability of the Gospels in which the narratives are found. If Matthew and Luke incorporated in their Gospels mere myths originating in Babylonia, or "old wives' fables," as the apostle Paul in ridicule termed them, or if they so colored the biography of Jesus with their own pious reflections on what according to the spirit of the time in Christian circles it was thought must have been present in the life of Jesus, but which had no foundation in historical fact, then it certainly follows for many that their absolute confidence in the reliability of the evangelists, Matthew and Luke, must be greatly modified.

It is not yet certain, however, that, as Harnack thinks, the "tradition of the birth and childhood is shattered"— nor do we believe that Christian faith can be divorced from historic fact. Christianity is an historical religion. It does not rest upon ideas, but upon facts. Its ideas or teachings are derived from the facts, and that difference is as great as the one between reality and transient notions.

This then is our task, to prove as far as the nature of the case will permit from the evidence of the New Testament, despite all that has been urged against it, that St.

Paul and other New Testament writers did have knowledge of the virgin birth of our Lord as recorded in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

It is quite probable, of course, that the evidence here offered may be regarded by deniers of the virgin birth as purely circumstantial, and its sufficiency thereby questioned. Should such objection be made it will be neither surprising nor conclusive. This objection will be raised, probably, on the ground that the evidence here presented is not demonstrative. But such objection would mean that no evidence in questions of this character is admissible except such as would practically be evidence impossible to obtain, that is, mathematical demonstration. Now, we admit if that evidence which inevitably creates a moral certainty in the mind and which no straight reasoning can destroy is to be set aside because it is not *demonstrable* evidence according to any exact meaning of the word, then our task is hopeless; there can be no solution of the question. Everyone knows that were such demand to be applied in everyday life, it would destroy the validity of morally certain evidence in thousands of cases in human affairs. If we were compelled to adhere as closely as all that to exact, inelastic proof, nothing, the contrary or opposite of which in the face of demonstration is conceivable, could be scientifically demonstrated.

If we affirm this to be so, then we must enlarge the boundaries of this severely exact definition of the term "demonstration." For on the basis of this narrower definition in present use, every branch of human knowledge except the exact sciences must be cast aside if this objection is valid. That two plus two equal four is demonstrable because it is not conceivable that they can equal any other number. In chemistry similar illustrations abound. But geology is not an exact science, nor is political economy, hence their propositions are not demonstrable. History

does not deal with the demonstrable, it would seem, for contrary fact is often conceivable in its field. To state it boldly, it is not "demonstrable," for example, that our Lord rose from the dead on the third day, since it is conceivable that He might have risen at some other time, in some other way, or that He did not rise at all. Hence the numerous theories of his resurrection invented by deniers of the supernatural.

But the intellectually honest inquirer who discerns between things that differ will perceive that theological, historical and philosophical truths are not susceptible of demonstration by the apparatus employed on mathematical or material facts. History cannot be verified in that sense, since to verify is to repeat, which history never does. In the nature of things, theological and historical truths must depend for their support solely upon moral certainty. What demonstrative proof is there, for example, that Caesar fell at the hands of Brutus and his fellow conspirators? Or what do we know of Solon the lawgiver? Diogenes and Plutarch are our chief writers concerning him. But they lived, the one seven, and the other eight hundred years after him.

That evidence which is otherwise competent, satisfactory and cumulative cannot be set aside as insufficient, nor its strength impaired, by characterizing it as this side of full demonstration, in order, if possible, to lessen its probable value; for it is this kind of evidence which is universally relied upon in the ordinary affairs of life. It may at times be more convincing than direct testimony.

It does not appear to be necessary to say much more by way of preface to the following pages, since the purpose and program of the writer are now evident. But it will be well, however, to draw attention expressly to the fact that the subject here discussed is not the virgin birth of our Lord itself, but the silence of St. Paul and other New

Testament writers concerning it. It is necessary to emphasize this lest our purpose be misunderstood. Whether the birth of our Lord occurred as related by Matthew and Luke or not, in nowise affects the question. Was such the belief of the primitive Church in Jerusalem? And did Paul know that it was? Whether the narratives are true, or whether Paul believed in the virgin birth, is wholly beside our inquiry. The simple question before us is, did Paul know that such was the belief of the Church in Jerusalem? This and this only is the question we are to consider.

The observing reader will doubtless soon note that the validity of much of the evidence in proof of the position taken by us depends in some measure upon an early dating for the Synoptic Gospels. But this is not wholly the case. As may be readily seen by a glance at Dr. Moffatt's *Introduction to the New Testament* (page 213), the date chosen will probably be questioned. But before it can be refuted the monumental work of Adolf von Harnack in his series, *Luke the Physician*, the *Acts of the Apostles*, the *Date of the Acts and the Synoptic Gospels*, must be destroyed. Much effort, of course, has been and will be expended to modify the conclusions of Harnack, but if one already acquainted with the literature of the subject, including Dr. Headlam's *Criticism of the New Testament* in his Margaret Lectures, Von Soden's *History of Early Christian Literature* and C. H. Turner's exhaustive article in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, will read Harnack's volumes through again, the author may be forgiven for predicting that opposing critics will no more be able to destroy the results of Harnack's labors than the wooers of Penelope were able to bend the bow of Ulysses.

And yet, while apparently much stress is placed by us upon the dates given to the Gospels by Harnack, the validity of the argument here presented does not depend upon

the accuracy of Harnack's conclusions. It is just this effort to fix the dates when the Gospels were written in order to account for the origin of the belief in the virgin birth that gives rise to so many difficulties. This method of approach to the problem is, we think, an entirely wrong method. The belief of the primitive Church in the miraculous birth did not originate in, nor was it created by, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, for it is self-evident that there must have been some belief in existence concerning the matter in the Christian community *before* it became a matter of record, unless we are to say that both Matthew and Luke, each independently of the other, invented the story. The degree of probability that this could have been so we may safely leave to the judgment of impartial criticism, for the possibility is remote indeed that two writers, neither dependent upon the other and both professing to relate a most sacred fact in the life of our Lord, should have invented the same fictitious event.

Both derived their information from a common source, the belief of the Church. Both differ in detail from each other only so far as each obtained his facts from different authorities within the Church—Matthew probably from Joseph, the putative father of Jesus, and Luke from Mary, the mother. or close intimates in the circle in which the traditions were treasured.

It may not be out of place, perhaps, to express the hope that this little book may be helpful to some inquiring soul in the twilight of faith, and that it may by its appeal to candid reason dispel the faintest doubt of the historicity of the birth of Jesus affirmed in that article of the Apostles' Creed which in the hush of the holy Sabbath multitudes of the faithful recite in Christian worship.

R. J. C.

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DID PAUL KNOW OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH?

CHAPTER I

PRIMITIVE BELIEF

From the earliest beginnings of the Christian Church until the present time, belief in the virgin birth of our Lord has been held in common with other articles of Christian faith. The first question, then, underlying all other questions in our inquiry is, How did this belief originate in the Christian Church?

Every belief has a beginning. Every belief is related to a time and a place—to a when and a where. We know when and where, and often by whom, certain dogmas originated which history shows to be corruptions of the primitive faith. We know that the doctrine of Papal infallibility was first declared to be a dogma in 1870 A. D.; that the doctrine of purgatory was established by the Council of Trent in 1563 A. D.; that Transubstantiation, first suggested in 831 A. D., was not declared a dogma until the Lateran Council in 1268 A. D.; we know the origin of these and many other additions to the early faith of the Church. But when and where did this doctrine of the virgin birth of our Lord originate?

In his thoroughgoing work, *The Apostolic Age*,[1] Carl Von Weizsäcker, referring to the primitive belief in the Jerusalem Church concerning Jesus, says:

> The belief that his descent was natural long continued to hold its ground. It showed itself in the compilation in the genealogical tree, which itself belongs to the second generation, and in the unhesitating mention of his father (Matthew xiii. 55).

[1] Vol. I. p. 19, Eng. Trans.

> Not even the doctrine that He had been conceived by the Holy Ghost, a doctrine which although it originated in another age yet arose as the final result of the thought of his equipment with the Spirit, could displace the older view of his parentage.

This eminent scholar, however, does not state in what "other age" nor in what year of that other age, nor among whom in that other age this doctrine originated. We know when belief in the human parentage of Jesus was asserted and by whom it was believed, which was when He began his public ministry. But when did the belief in his divine parentage arise?

If we shall be able to settle these elementary questions it will narrow down the discussion to a somewhat more definite time and place; and this will enable us to eliminate much that is irrelevant. Our knowledge that the belief could not have arisen at any other time than the time discovered in our researches will serve to isolate our study from many other questions and render more certain our conclusions.

Paul's silence is easily accounted for, if belief in the virgin birth did not exist in Paul's day. He could not, nor could other New Testament writers, have known anything about it. If it did exist, then he was as likely as other men to have known of it. All other questions, such as whether it was true or false, pass immediately beyond the rim of this discussion as wholly irrelevant, the only question we are interested in being, Did Paul know of it?

In order to set before our minds some clear conception of this subject of the silence of St. Paul concerning the virgin birth of our Lord, it is necessary to see some facts connected with the beginning of the Christian Church in which this belief had its origin as they really were. For if we confine ourselves solely to critical discussions on

Greek texts, or to the conjectures of philologists on MSS. and various readings, or to the hypotheses, subjective notions and foregone conclusions, more confusing than illuminating, of negative criticism, we shall never arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. This is evident from the fact that even if all that may be alleged from different readings in old or newly discovered Greek and Syriac MSS. were admitted for the sake of the argument to be true, without stopping to check up concerning the origin of those texts, or whether they had been tampered with or not, still the unassailable, self-evident fact would remain that the belief, whether true or not, was in existence before those texts existed. Moreover, those texts do not answer the vital question, How did this belief originate in the Christian Church?

Before we are ready to reach a conclusion upon any subject, the first question to be answered must always be, What are the facts? To construct history according to a preconceived theory, to force facts to fit the theory, or to set aside opposing witnesses as unreliable, may be convenient, but it is not scientific. Facts come before theory. Nor should each fact or event be considered in isolation, for a part is not the whole, but each fact should be considered in the light of the whole story if anything like an approach to the truth, rather than the confirmation of a particular theory, is our goal.

It is only in the degree that we are able to throw ourselves back into the religious and social life of that early day without letting go of the vantage ground of the present, and become ourselves, as it were, members of the Church at Jerusalem and share in the activities, hopes and experiences of the Christian community there, that we shall be at all able to get beyond the bare, scrappy letter of the record in the Acts of the Apostles, or to understand in any clear way the beginnings of Christian doctrine and

of those divisions and heresies which we find later spread out full grown before us on the pages of history. For as the historian, Parkman, observes:

> Faithfulness to the truth of history involves far more than a research, however patient and scrupulous, into special facts. Such facts may be detailed with the most exactness, and yet the narrative, taken as a whole, may be unmeaning and untrue. The narrator must seek to imbue himself with the life and spirit of the time. He must study events in their bearings near and remote; in the character, habits, and manners of those who took part in them. He must himself be, as it were, a sharer, or a spectator of the action he describes.[2]

Any logical inquiry, therefore, into the silence of St. Paul in regard to the birth of Jesus from a virgin, must first begin with two fundamental questions.

I. What was the belief of the apostolic Church in Jerusalem from Pentecost to 70 A. D.?

II. Did Paul know the belief of that Church?

We must begin at just this particular period for the reason that the origin of the virgin birth cannot be dated as late even as the close of the first century, since at that time it was already a doctrine universally preached, as we learn from the Epistle of Ignatius (110 A. D.) and the Apology of Aristides[3] (126 A. D.). Nor can it be assigned to the period between 70-100 A. D. for the reason that the narrative of the birth had already been read pub-

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[2] *Pioneers of France in the New World*, Intro.

[3] "The Christians," writes Aristides, "derive their origin from the Lord Jesus Christ. This Son of God Most High is acknowledged in the Holy Spirit, having descended from heaven for the salvation of men; and having been born of a holy Virgin, without seed and purely, he assumed flesh and appeared unto men that he may recall them from the error of polytheism and having finished his wonderful dispensation, through the cross he tasted death through his own will, according to the great dispensation."

licly in Christian communities long before that time, from Matthew's and Luke's Gospels.[4]

We are driven, therefore, and necessarily so, to seek its origin in the apostolic period, for there is no other period to which it can belong—in those years between the beginning of the Church at Jerusalem and the flight of the Church from Jerusalem at the approach of the Roman armies (66 A. D.)—in those years when the apostles were dwelling yet in Jerusalem, years crowned with the events and persons of the great leaders of the primitive Church who flit before us in the Book of Acts.

This important fact, to begin with, seems firmly established on historical ground. W. C. Allen, in his Commentary on Matthew, says, "The date furnished by the Gospel itself seems best satisfied if we suppose that its author compiled it within a period of a few years before or after the fall of Jerusalem in A. D. 70."

Alfred Plummer says, in his Commentary on Matthew, "Therefore, while we hardly place the Gospel as early as 65 A. D., we can hardly place it as late as 75 A. D. And on the whole a little after 70 is rather more probable than a little before."

Professor Sanday in his Bampton Lectures on *Inspiration* is of the opinion that "The great mass of the narrative in the first three Gospels took shape before the destruction of Jerusalem, within less than forty years of the events."[5] events."[5]

We are now ready to consider the first question: *What was the belief of the primitive Church?*

Our first glimpse of the Church in Jerusalem is on the day of Pentecost. On that day the Christian Church was created. In the city a million people crowded the narrow

[4] See Harnack, *Date of the Gospels and Acts*.
[5] p. 283.

streets.[6] "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, the dwellers in Mesopotamia and in Judea and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers from Rome, Jews and Proselytes, Cretes and Arabians."[7]

In a house well known to the apostles,[8] the disciples of Jesus had met and, as had been their custom for some time past, were engaged in prayer for the fulfillment of the promise made to them by their risen Lord.[9] In this company also, it will be observed, the entire living family of Jesus were present. "These all continued in prayer and supplication with the women, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with the brethren."[10] With the apostles and disciples, Mary the mother was also engaged in prayer for the power of the Holy Spirit promised by her Son. With them she also took part in the prayer to Jesus in the election of a successor to Judas Iscariot in the apostleship. She was one with that company in their experiences, belief and expectations.

This is our first glimpse of the origins of the Church. The historian Luke then relates that: "When the Day of Pentecost was fully come there came suddenly a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind and it filled all the house where they were sitting, and there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire and it sat upon each of them and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost."[11] Upon the head of Mary, as upon the others, quivered the cloven tongues of fire. It "sat upon each of them." She too was to testify, the cloven tongues symbolized, as were the others, and with them she too was "filled with the Holy Ghost."

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[6] See the footnote in Milman's *History of the Jews*, Bk. XVI, Vol. II, p. 387.
[7] Acts ii. 8.
[8] Weizsäcker, *The Apostolic Age*, Vol. I, p. 21.
[9] Acts i. 8.
[10] *Ibid.*, i. 14.
[11] *Ibid.*, i. 14.

Various attempts, which it is not necessary to refute, have been made to explain away this supernatural phenomena. Wernle in his *Beginnings of Christianity,* a work in which one would expect exact discussion of the tremendous events which ushered in organized Christianity, wholly ignores Pentecost.[12] Weizsäcker regards Luke's historical statement as "clearly an imitation of the symbolical legends told by the Jews of the proclamation of the law."[13] But whatever may be the explanation, or the corresponding form of denial, one thing is absolutely certain, *something happened.* No criticism can obliterate the fact of Pentecost from the beginning of Christianity. The Christian Church is still here. It began *sometime, somewhere, somehow.* Every effect certainly must have a cause, and every cause must be equal to the effect, and the origin of the Christian Church must be accounted for on these two principles. On that day human history was cleft in twain. The old world passed away, the new was born. On that day the Christian Church began its long history. It came out of "concealment," as Weizsäcker terms the period of waiting for the "promise of the Father," into the open; and the apostles "preached Jesus."

The immediate result of this preaching was the beginning of the growth of the Christian Church. Multiplied thousands[14] accepted Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and in breaking of bread and in prayer." For two or three years, that is, until the death of Stephen, the apostles and the disciples continued their work in the city, "signs and wonders" accompanying their preaching. Finally, priests and Levites began to be influenced by the extraordinary

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[12] Even the word "Pentecost" is not in the index to his two volumes.

[13] *The Apostolic Age,* Vol. II, p. 25.

[14] Weizsäcker denies this by simply stating on his own authority that the figures that represent the growth of Christianity are artificial (Vol. I, p. 24). But see Harnack's *Expansion of Christianity,* Vol. II.

teaching of these new prophets, and thousands of the people led by their example were converted to the new faith. The situation became increasingly alarming to the Sanhedrin. Jesus of Nazareth, the "crucified," was about to capture Jerusalem, the center of Judaism. It seemed to the chief rulers at that critical moment that a political and religious necessity was laid upon them, "lest the Romans come upon us and destroy our nation," to crush out at once this expanding heresy. Persecution began.

Saul, an ardent patriot and devoted zealot in the faith of his fathers, was then a resident in the city, and stung by the success of the new faith, he took the field and "made havoc of the Church."[15] The disciples scattered by him "went everywhere preaching the word." But the apostles remained in the city.[16]

What was the public teaching of the apostles? What was the distinctive instruction given by them during these years in forming and establishing the belief of those Jewish Christians who constituted the primitive Church in Jerusalem? It is not necessary here, for it does not belong to our subject, to enter the domain of New Testament theology and examine each distinctive doctrine in apostolic Christology in its later development. It will suffice to point out that the sermon of Peter on the day of Pentecost may assuredly be taken as the keynote to the whole body of preaching and teaching that followed and became among the Jerusalem Christians the standard of belief.[17] This distinctive, fundamental teaching was contained in the phrase "Jesus and the resurrection." "This Jesus had God raised up whereof we are all witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed

[15] Acts viii. 3.
[16] *Ibid.*, viii. 4.
[17] *Ibid.*, ii. 43.

forth this which ye now see and hear . . . therefore let all the house of Israel assuredly know that God hath made this same Jesus whom ye crucified both Lord and Christ."[18]

Whoever would give more than superficial study to this entire subject should consider with utmost care the relation of this definite affirmation of belief in the supernatural character of Jesus to the belief of this same primitive Church in his supernatural birth. One may, if he so choose, deny, with such writers as Bousset,[19] Schmidt[20] and Pfleiderer,[21] that a truly divine nature was attributed to Jesus by the apostles and the first disciples, or with Beyschlag that any such teaching appears in their several writings in the New Testament. So cautious a scholar, however, as Bernhard Weiss[22] may be taken as representative of the best critical thought on this particular subject. He shows that in calling Jesus "Lord" He is pointed to by those disciples not only as the Lord of the theocracy of believers, but also named simply "the Lord," as only Jehovah himself beside is named. The Messiah who is exalted to this Lordship must, of course, be a divine being.[23] Stevens of Yale also expresses clearly the view which is generally held by conservative New Testament scholars, that "in view of the Septuagint use of Lord as a name for Jehovah it is difficult to see how a Jewish mind could attach to the Lordship which ascribed to Jesus any meaning not implying his superhuman character."[24]

Beyschlag, it is true, endeavors to break the force of such judgments by putting emphasis on the thought that Jesus was not *essentially* divine, but had that status con-

[18] This sermon of Peter's is in theological agreement with John i. 14. Peter designates Jesus as "a man approved of God," but also as "Lord"; John portrays Him as the Eternal Logos, and also human—He "became flesh."

[19] *Jesus.*

[20] *The Prophet of Nazareth.*

[21] *Early Christian Conception of Christ.*

[22] *Biblical Theology,* Eng. Trans.

[23] *Ibid.,* Vol. I, p. 180.

[24] *New Testament Theology,* Eng. Trans.

ferred upon Him by his exaltation: "God has made Jesus Lord, viz., by exalting Him to his right hand; if the name Lord had the meaning of eternal Deity that expression would be impossible, for to be made and by eternal nature to be are mutually exclusive terms."[25]

This gifted theologian, however, seems to have missed the thought of Peter. He fails to note that Peter is contrasting the *earthly* condition of Jesus lately crucified with his present position on the throne of God. As Meyer correctly interprets it:[26] "Previously He *was* indeed likewise Lord and Messiah but in the form of a servant; and it was after laying aside that form that He *became* such in reality"; that is, actual possessor of the Theocratic Kingdom. The Messianic character, however, and the divine nature of Jesus involved in it are not in any sense an acquisition. Perhaps it should be said that in a recent work, *The History of Dogma,* Professor Seeberg agrees with this stand taken by Meyer, and clearly states that in Jesus who was made Lord of the Kingdom was essentially the divine nature. This he says was made plain to the disciples by his resurrection. Henceforth they recognized Him not only as the divinely chosen Lord of the historical theocracy but as the Son of God in the sense of the only begotten of God, as John i. 18 is to be read, the Son of God coördinate with the Father and the Spirit.[27]

Further light on the teaching of the apostles is manifest

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[25] J. Estlin Carpenter in his work, *Phases of Early Christianity,* p. 65, observes, "Soon after the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70, Jews in Egypt, men and boys, suffered death, refusing to call Caesar 'Lord,' because they held that title to God alone," and refers to Josephus, *Wars,* VII, X, 1. Cited also by Deissman, *Light from the Ancient East,* p. 359.

[26] See Commentary on Acts ii. 36.

[27] "Den Menchen Jesus hatte Got erwahlt zum Messias oder Gottessohn. Aber dieser Mensch hatte fur sich eine Herresschaft in Auspruch, die uber das Messianische hinausging. In ihm war göttliches Wesen. Diese wurde den Jungern in der Gemeinschaft des Auferstandenen klar. Hinfort erkennen sie in ihm nicht nur den Messias als den gotterwahllen theokratischgeschtlichen Gottessohn, sondern dem himmelischen Herrn, den Sohn Gottes in sinn des Theos Monogenes wie John i. 18 zu lessen ist den Sohn der mit dem Vater und dem Geist Kooriniert ist" (p. 63).

in the fact that converts were baptized "in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins." Peter, and John with him, declared Him to be God's Son, God having raised up his Son Jesus."[28] The teaching of the apostles is echoed in the preaching of Stephen who bears testimony before the Sanhedrin to the common faith of the disciples: "Behold I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God."

Now Paul, it should be carefully noted, had heard of this faith daily from the Christians in Jerusalem. At the trial of Stephen he heard the same belief expressed, and immediately after his conversion he himself preached this doctrine in the synagogue at Damascus, viz., that Christ "is the Son of God."[29]

This primitive Church is a Jewish Church. While, as we learn from the Book of Acts, there were thousands of Hellenic Jews dwelling in Jerusalem, that is, those Hebrews who had come from foreign countries as distinguished from those who were natives of Palestine, it must not be forgotten that they all were Hebrews. Though they had lived among the pagan peoples in Egypt or in Persia, in Mesopotamia or in Rome, in Cappadocia or in Arabia or Crete—wherever it might be that they had resided—they were still Jews, uncontaminated by the habits and customs of the heathen. They had remained devout and faithful to the traditions of Judaism and zealous for the laws of Jehovah. Those who have gone afar into distant lands often show more reverence and love for the sacred scenes and associations of the religion of their fathers than do those who continue to live amid the shrines of the early faith. To those stay-at-homes, by reason of their familiarity with holy things, even the temple itself might have become commonplace. So these Hellenic Jews were often

[28] Acts iii. 26.
[29] *Ibid.*, ix. 20.

more intense in their religious devotion to the laws of Moses and in their hatred of the idolatrous nations round about them, as witness the case of Paul himself, than were those who had not learned contempt for paganism in foreign lands.

There are no foreign influences at work here. No heathen legends of the birth of gods and heroes are known or at least accepted among these Jewish Christians. It is exceedingly important in our study that this should be carefully observed. Otherwise the impossibility that a heathen myth should originate among Jewish Christians cannot be fully appreciated. Schurer,[30] on the authority of Josephus, tells us that any reprisal would be suffered rather than let the Emperor Caligula set up a statue in the temple; that in the time of Herod not even a representation of an eagle was permitted at the gate of the temple; and that when Pilate marched his troops into Jerusalem it occasioned a riot. Solely in order to avoid polluting the sacred soil of Judea, Vitellius took his troops to Petra by a roundabout course. The palace of Antipas in Tiberius was destroyed because it contained images of animals at the first outbreak of war. No kind of business dealings whatever were carried on with a Gentile by an Israelite, lest he should thereby be polluted. If a stove had been heated by wood taken from a pagan grove, the stove must be broken and rendered unuseable. If bread had been baked in the stove, they were forbidden to eat the bread. Indeed, as Schurer says, "The more vigorously and perseveringly heathenism continued to penetrate into Palestine, the more energetically did legal Judaism feel called upon to oppose it." Hence, between Judaism and heathenism there was an impassable gulf.

Nor is there any trace here, contrary to the suggestion of certain writers, of Hellenic influence. However con-

[30] *The Jewish People in Time of Jesus Christ*, Vol. I, Div. II, pp. 52, 53.

fused may have been the jumble of Greek mysteries, of Oriental phantasies, Mithras worship, Isis worship and the like floating in the general thought of that day among Gentile masses in Palestine, owing to the flux of ideas among all peoples, nevertheless here the innate Jewish prejudice continued inflexible against all things foreign, the cleansing and illuminating power of the Holy Spirit "working wonders" among the people. All notions of pagan gods and legends of the supernatural births of heroes, which such scholars as Cheyne and Gunkle and Pfleiderer insist on introducing on every occasion, therefore must be absolutely excluded. The whole *milieu* is intensely Jewish. The preaching, the religious fervor, the joyful confidence in the Messianic character of Jesus, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit fulfilling the prophecy of Joel, all have an Old Testament tenor and background. Their roots are sunk deep in the religious soil, deep in the ideas and feelings and habits of the Chosen People. They see Jesus the Messiah in the framework of their national history, they see him in the heart of their sacred writings, and everything foreign to that understanding of Him is rejected. Such is the situation following Pentecost.

Now, naturally, two compelling questions lying at the root of our inquiry arise here:

(1) Did these early Christians make any intimate inquiries during those days concerning the birth and descent of Jesus?

(2) And, if so, what was the attitude of Mary, the mother of Jesus, toward such inquiries?

Such questions, then, as above propounded cannot be avoided. In keeping with the very nature of our minds they force themselves upon our attention and compel us, whether we can answer them satisfactorily or not, to consider and weigh them seriously. Those who oppose the doctrine of the virgin birth and, for proof of their posi-

tion, confine themselves to the silence of the New Testament regarding it—as if silence proved anything—or to the lack of records, or to the recital of ancient legends, seem to forget that there are other elements of human nature which are involved in the subject as a whole. They rely in support of rejection solely on their disbelief in the supernatural, or upon the seeming purport of the Book, sketchy and fragmentary as it is. And if human nature, that is, the full psychology entering into the situation, is brought into court, it is at once rejected as irrelevant, a product of mere imagination. Certainly fiction is one thing and history another, but the student of New Testament criticism is fully aware that imagination is not the sole prerogative of one class of critics, nor can it ever be. Imagination, as Zahn, the illustrious scholar of Erlangen, had occasion to write, has a legitimate place in historical science. Its place there is "to set in a clear light the possibility and probability of the presuppositions which are surrounded by the actual facts." But, on the other hand, "the imagination must guard itself carefully against postulates which have possible support only in the narrow experience whose vision is bounded by the four walls of a study."[31]

Mary lived for some years in Jerusalem.[32] In all probability she died there,[33] and not until after her death did John leave Jerusalem and take up his residence in Ephesus. Mary lived in close association with those who had been in intimate fellowship with the Lord, among the friendly thousands who believed in Him as the Messiah of Israel. They all knew her as the mother of Jesus and they must have regarded her with peculiar reverence.

Those were marvelous days. Not since the world began had there been such a manifestation of acts of immediacy

[31] *Introduction to the New Testament*, Vol. II, p. 376, Eng. Trans.
[32] John xix. 27. Cf. Gal. ii. 1-9.
[33] Farrar, *Early Days of Christianity*, pp. 379, 388 and notes.

on the part of God. It is difficult for us to recover faintly in thought and feeling the experiences of those who were on the ground and suddenly before their own eyes saw the mighty hand of God in "signs and wonders" wrought by the apostles, and felt as men never felt before, the surgings of that triumphant power agitating multiplied thousands, which turned out to be a religious revolution unparalleled in human history.

Unless human nature has radically changed in the interval, it is in harmony with universal human experience to believe that among these multitudes of Christian believers inquisitiveness must have been at fever heat and an intensely religious desire, as well as a loving and reverential curiosity urging them to learn everything that could be discovered concerning the person and life of Jesus. This, doubtless, will be admitted. To assert the contrary right in full view of the extraordinary events taking place is to assert something at odds with human nature and especially untrue to the social characteristics of Oriental peoples, as is brought out in the Book of Acts.

Moreover, the information concerning the birth of the Messiah which Matthew afterwards incorporated in his Gospel, and which Luke gave to Theophilus, who with the natural instinct of a Greek would desire to know the history of Jesus "from the *beginning*," was no chance find. It would be eagerly sought for with profound religious and theological interest by teachers of the people, that is, the priests and Levites, who were versed in Old Testament prophecy, as well as by the unlearned multitudes who formed the Christian community. It is quite probable that in those days, certainly not later, the Logia or Sayings of our Lord, the source material to which so much importance is at present attached in New Testament criticism, were salvaged, for every scrap of information concerning Jesus that could be obtained from the apostles and from

those who had heard the very words of Jesus from the beginning, was set aside for preservation.

The opposite stand appears to be well-nigh impossible to assume. For what is the contrary view but the assumption that no inquiry whatever of weight and consequence was made concerning the birth and early life of Jesus; that no questions were ever asked of Mary, the mother, who was still in the city and was known to the apostles and to all the Church? Is this contrary supposition plausible? Such want of inquisitiveness was never known before. Why should it be so now? All the Gospels testify that Jesus was the object of ceaseless and varied questions concerning himself, his authority and his mission, wherever He went. "Is not this the carpenter's son?" "Is not this the son of Joseph and are not his sisters and his brethren with us?" "Is not this the Christ, and if the Christ should come will he do more than this man does?" "Whence art thou? And by what authority doest thou these things?" Jesus was always a mystery, and mystery is always a creator of inquiry.

The study of Prophecy concerning the Messiah, which apostolic preaching so greatly emphasized, and the fulfillment of which in Christ was the constant theme and burden of all the apostles' teaching, must have of itself stimulated and compelled inquiry concerning his parentage among large circles of devout Jews. Isaiah, Zechariah, Hosea, Micah, the Psalms—all contain predictions and descriptions of the Messiah. Hence in the minds of the multitude the question would inevitably arise, Were these predictions fulfilled in Jesus? Isaiah vii. 4 had declared his birth should be of a virgin; had this condition been met?[34] Was this Jesus born of a virgin? Micah had pointed out his birthplace. Was Jesus born in that town?

[34] The Septuagint, then in popular use, reads: "behold the virgin (parthenos) shall conceive . . . ."

Mary, the mother of Jesus, knew. No one else could have known. Joseph was dead, as we infer from the fact that in his dying moments Jesus committed his mother to St. John. It is only natural to assume, therefore, that information which would be accepted as trustworthy would be sought from her. That it should be obtained was of vital importance to the Church at Jerusalem, since that body was composed of Jews who were steeped in the knowledge of the Scriptures, for if the facts did not agree with the prophecies of Isaiah and Micah and with other prophets of the Messianic day, this Jesus, whatever else He might be, could not be the Christ of Prophecy.

The whole religious and social situation shuts us in to the belief that Mary, the mother, could not have refused to answer such inquiries as must have been made during all these years that she spent with the Church in Jerusalem. It is more than probable that she had already confided her sacred secret to the holy women who had been of the company of Jesus and were also her friends and relatives. Before her son Jesus was risen from the dead and glorified at the right hand of God to which He had ascended in the sight of them all, there was reason enough for prudent silence. For what value or significance would there have been to divulge if Jesus, by his resurrection and by this testimony of Pentecost from Almighty God, Jehovah Himself, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, had not been demonstrated to be the Son of God? Who would have believed Mary had she revealed her secret before this extraordinary occurrence? Naturally diffident, modest and retiring as, in Luke's Narrative of the Annunciation she is shown to have been, is it likely that this shrinking, sensitive woman, who refrained from disclosing her secret even to her betrothed husband but must go with it beyond the mountains to her kinswoman Elizabeth, would proclaim it to the whole world? Such a disclosure would not

have been of any service whatever to the ministry of Jesus, but only would have exposed her to universal shame.

But now He is risen all is changed. She herself is filled with the Spirit. The stupendous events connected with Pentecost and the resurrection have demonstrated the true nature of the Son of Mary, the Son of God. He is now in the deepest sense no longer her son. He is the Son of God.

He is now seen to have been from his very birth the organ of the Spirit of God. The Spirit glorifies Him before the people by "signs and wonders." By the Spirit He was raised from the dead. By the Spirit He came into the world, and by the Spirit He was led through his life. The outpouring of the Spirit of God has thus created in the Church a situation, a state of mind, an atmosphere, favorable to belief in which at the providential time the secret of Mary, the truth concerning the birth of the Lord, could be revealed.

The personal relation, the mental and spiritual attitude of Mary toward the marvelous revelations in those days of the character of Jesus is thus made clear to us. All events conspired to make it easy for her secret to be made known. Whatever the rest of Jerusalem heard told in the preaching of Peter and John, Mary also heard. Upon her also, as upon the apostles, had descended prophetic power, the cloven tongues of fire and the illuminating energy of the Holy Ghost. She was constantly of the apostolic company and shared in their reminiscences. With the astonished thousands who had listened to Peter, Mary heard her son proclaimed the Messiah of God, "the Prince of Life." Wih her own eyes she saw the signs and wonders of God. What reason, after that, for further reticence? Why, if there were any additional facts to be told, suppress them longer?

That Mary had ever penetrated, prior to the resurrection

and this outpouring of the revealing Spirit, the mystery of Jesus, is not, of course, to be conceded, in view of all the evidence there is against it. There was nothing in the words of the angel who announced his birth, marvelous as they were, to signify that the child to be born would be God Incarnate. Such an idea would not only have been foreign to the Jewish conception of God, but also incomprehensible to a simple Jewish maiden who could not even grasp the idea of soon becoming a mother: "Since I know not man." A sudden conviction like the lightning flash of Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!" was never the experience of Mary, so far as the records show. She walked in mystery. When Jesus declared that Peter's penetration of his secret was not the result of reasoning or hearsay, "for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee but my Father which is in heaven," that saying excluded his mother and members of her household from having any knowledge of his true nature.

Always wondering, always keeping those things "in her heart," her son's sayings, his doings, mystified Mary. Always trusting him, hesitant and only partially successful in her attempts to understand Him, it is no wonder that her facts concerning his birth should have been kept secret by her during his earthly life. Not understanding Him to her own satisfaction, notwithstanding her unshared experience, how could she hope to make others understand? What would she do when asked for proofs or any evidence? On the other hand, there would have been no reason for keeping secret any of the facts if He had been born of earthly parents, even though his birth had been announced by an angel, for there had been other similar instances before in the history of Israel. This secrecy itself is evidence that something memorable had happened.

But this is not the only instance where known facts were not revealed by members of the inner circle. Much was known to some of the disciples that is not found in their writings,[35] many conversations and discourses of which we have no account. In John xvii. 1, 2 it is written, "When Jesus had spoken these words He went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron where was a garden . . . for Jesus oftimes resorted thither with his disciples." Now, we cannot suppose that in these hours of quietness and repose in this secluded spot Jesus had no conversation with his disciples concerning the Kingdom of God, and yet the Four Gospels contain no discourse of his delivered in the garden of Gethsemane.

There were things which the disciples also did not understand until the resurrection threw its radiance into their dark places and lighted up their significance, as is suggested in the wonderful story of the walk to Emmaus.[36] Even within the circle of the disciples there were certain events, such as the Transfiguration, which were known to a few—to Peter and John and James—but were not known to the others; for Jesus expressly charged these disciples, saying, "Tell the vision to no man till the Son of Man be risen from the dead."[37]

There were sufficient reasons, it is clear, for this command. For if it were told who could visualize the scene from the mere telling, or understand the significance of so astounding a revelation? Or, in default of its having occurred and been seen by certain men with their own eyes, who could believe that such an outburst of inward glory in the person of Jesus could occur; that living men could look upon the face of Moses, the Lawgiver of Israel; or see the face of Elijah, the prophet; and, above all, hear the voice of God himself sounding out of the

[35] John xxi. 25.
[36] Luke xxiv. 13-27.
[37] Matt. xviii. 9.

clouds and exalting Jesus above Moses and the prophets as the spokesman of Jehovah?

Probably some similar dread of incredulousness was the reason why the facts relative to the Lord's birth were not made matters of common knowledge during his earthly life. Who would have believed them? It was the resurrection, which *demonstrated* Him to be the Son of God, that broke down all barriers. By pouring its revealing light over all events, it made possible belief in that which before was unbelievable. And if the origin of Jesus, even after the resurrection, did not enter into the preaching of the apostles, this was probably because they were viewing his career from the Godward side solely, and it did not possess any immediate, vital relation to human redemption, which was the supreme subject of the Gospel they were preaching.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead thus not only gave men insight into vast areas of the revelation of God, and confirmed all that Jesus had claimed for himself, but it enabled the secret facts concerning his birth to be told in a community of believers in his divine nature. All risk of the possibility of false reflection upon his origin or of unbelief as to the miraculous character of his birth was over, since this audience had themselves witnessed and experienced in this mighty display of divine power confirmation of the facts now first made known. "By the resurrection," says the apostle, Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead."[38] His real nature was not apprehensible by men until the resurrection demonstrated it.

If Mary ever thus revealed the facts, it seems very probable (other considerations to the same effect will appear later) that she did so during this early period, that is, some

[38] Rom. i. 4.

time between Pentecost and the rise of the Judaizing party in Jerusalem. It was in those God-filled days when the energy of the Holy Spirit was so mightily manifested among believers, demonstrating beyond all cavil the divine truth of the apostolic preaching, that the virgin birth of our Lord became known to the Church in Jerusalem. This is the period we fix upon, at any rate, as the date of the revelation, and it is to this period, as it will be shown, that all lines of evidence converge.

As previously set forth, no other period either later or earlier adjusts itself to the facts of history. Too much emphasis cannot be put upon this point. Its intelligent acceptance will dispose at once of many ingenious theories and numerous volumes of critical observations on this subject which have become current in theological literature.

In favor of this period there is abundant evidence, but not for any other period. In his *Introduction to the New Testament*, Zahn affirms that: "Passages like Luke i. 11, of which the poetical charm and true Israelitish spirit of the narrative portions and inserted psalms is comparable only to the finest parts of the Books of Samuel, could not have been originated by a Greek like Luke. They must have originated in Palestine, where men and women of prophetic temperament and prophetic gifts were closely associated with the beginnings and progress of Christianity."[39] Luke twice points out that Mary kept in memory and pondered significant sayings associated with the childhood and youth of her son.[40] In this way Luke indicates that traditions in Luke i. 11 were transmitted through her. Who first wrote them down and when they were written we do not know.[41] Such is Zahn's testimony as to time. Admittedly, we do not know who first wrote down the narratives, but we do know that they

[39] i. 41, 46, 55, 67, 71; ii. 25, 36. Acts ii. 17; xi. 29 ff.; xv. 32; xxi. 9 f.
[40] ii. 19, 51 f.; i. 66.
[41] Vol. III, pp. 112, 113, Eng. Trans.

were in existence before Luke and Matthew embodied them in their Gospels.

Harnack says that the story of the infancy of our Lord in Luke's Gospel comes from circles quite different from those whence sprang the corresponding story in St. Matthew. Interest in Joseph is here almost wanting. "St. Mary is, on the other hand, thrust into the foreground; *vide* i. 26, 45, 56; ii. 5, 16, 19, 33-35, 48, 51; indeed, from ii. 19, 51 it follows that the stories are intended to be regarded in the last instance as from St. Mary herself. Here, although we are, of course, destitute of all means of historical control, there can be no doubt that these stories have been fully edited by a poetic artist, namely, St. Luke. But there can be just as little doubt that St. Luke regarded them as proceeding from St. Mary; for his practice elsewhere as an historian proves that it would not be like him to turn round and invent such a story. Hence we may conclude that they came to him with a claim to the authority of St. Mary, and therefore certainly from Palestine."[42] Such then, in passing, is Harnack's testimony as to time.

In John xix. 27, 28 it is stated that Jesus in the agony of approaching death committed his mother to the care of the beloved disciple John. And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home. The continued residence of the apostle in Jerusalem for a number of years as is shown in the Acts is evidence that John did not take the mother of Jesus back to his Galilean home. He had a house in Jerusalem. But in or about 41 A. D., choosing that one among numerous dates suggested, Paul was present at the Council in Jerusalem and Luke was with him.[43] John was also present at that Council. Is it not probable then that at this time, if no earlier,[44] Luke received from

[42] *Date of Acts*, etc., p. 154.
[43] Acts xxi.
[44] *Ibid.*, xii.

the mother of the Lord herself the narrative he recorded later in his Gospel? It makes little difference on this point if the date of the Council is placed some years later. At whichever of these dates we accept, John, then living in Jerusalem, was present, and Mary was living at that time in his home, for the earliest tradition tells us that she accompanied him to Ephesus, a living witness to the belief held in the Church concerning the birth of her son.

Thorough criticism of the theories of Lobstein, Keim, Schmidt, Conybeare, Usener and others who are compelled to insist upon a later date for the Gospels, leads also to the final conclusion that whatever direction our investigations take we are finally driven back to the Church in Jerusalem for the time and the place that the belief in the virgin birth originated.

Nor is there anything strange in this. Here in Jerusalem Jesus was proclaimed the Son of God. Here also, and during this period, the Judaizing party took its rise, who were the first to deny the virgin birth. At a later period they were known as the Ebionites. In the ranks of these Judaists, says Farrar, there arose that imminent danger of apostasy against which they had received such solemn warnings in the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of St. James himself; *it was from their ranks also that there arose the two sects of Ebionites and Nazarenes.*"[45] Harnack states that the distinctions of belief among the Jewish Christians (Ebionites, Nazarenes) were "already formulated in the Apostolic Age."[46] Among the points of con-

[45] *Early Days of Christianity*, Chap. XXX, p. 496.

[46] *History of Dogma*, Eng. Trans., p. 76. Baur, *Dogmengeschicte*, p. 64, says that opposition to Paul by this party assumed the characters of Ebionism which was not only antagonistic to Pauline teachings—"Sondern in der Opposition gegen die apostolische Auctoritat des Apostles Paulus bestand." See Hagenbach, *History of Doctrine*, Vol. I, pp. 67, 68 and Index; Wernle, *Beginnings of Christianity*, Vol. I, pp. 156, 157; Weizäcker, *The Apostolic Age*, Vol. II, see Ebionite, Index. J. Estlin Carpenter says these Ebionites "were the heirs of the situation indicated in the Book of Acts." "Both these types of Jewish Christians clung to humanitarian views of the Person of Christ; they rejected His miraculous Conception and His Deity" (*Phases of Early Christianity*).

troversy at issue were: "Whether Paul was a chosen servant of Christ, or a God-hated interloper; whether Jesus was the Son of Joseph, or was miraculously begotten of the Holy Spirit."

Here it is natural to inquire, How could this party in the primitive Church have denied the virgin birth if that birth had not already been a subject of knowledge? That which is not known cannot be rejected. The conclusion that seems to force itself upon us, therefore, is that, in the Church at Jerusalem the miraculous birth of Jesus was accepted, and that this belief arose while Mary, the mother of Jesus, was still alive. This is the way in brief that we find and fix upon the period at which the belief arose, and the place in which it originated. That the story of the birth was known in the Church before Luke composed his Gospel is testified to by Luke himself in the preface to his Gospel. He begins his history with the statement that: "Since many have undertaken to draw up in regular order a narrative of those facts which have been fully established among us, just as those who were eye-witnesses from the beginning delivered them to us, it has seemed proper for me also, having traced accurately everything from the beginning, to write to thee, Most Excellent Theophilus, in an orderly manner in order that thou mayest know the certainty of the things thou hast been taught."

It is clear from this statement that the primitive Church did not remain content with the oral instruction of the apostles and that there arose a demand for a detailed account in writing of the life and teachings of the Lord. Who the "many" were that had attempted to do this, where they lived, what opportunities they had to learn the facts and what their detailed accounts contained, we do not know. We only know, or infer, that all they wrote which was a departure from the New Testament was not satisfactory to the Church at large. Possibly

those narratives were too fragmentary, or were lacking in accuracy. These defects Luke undertakes to remedy by giving an authoritative, exact and orderly account of everything from the beginning. The evangelist Mark had failed in this respect in that his Gospel narrative begins with Jesus' entrance upon his ministry and dates the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel from that event, but tells nothing of Jesus' birth and childhood and other related events.

But it is evident that, whoever these first historians were, they belonged to the Church in Jerusalem or were in close touch with its members or with the apostolic leaders there, for it was from such only that they could obtain any information, if they needed any assistance beyond their own personal knowledge and experience. It is also clear that these "many" writers lived within the period we have designated, since what they wrote must have been tested by a sufficient length of time to have proved its unsatisfactory character.

It will be noticed that every statement in Luke's preface leads us back to a time long prior to the writing of his Gospel. He is to write of certain facts, the authenticity of which had already been fully established in the belief of the Church, that is, the Jerusalem Church, for no other could have borne witness to facts.

These facts were given by those who had been eye-witnesses and preachers of these things. They were undoubtedly the apostles who for some years taught the Church in Jerusalem. Among these witnesses, as we have seen, was Mary, his mother, who was as able to vouch for the life, the death and resurrection of her son as were any of the apostles, and although she appears nowhere in the New Testament after the account of Pentecost, except for a simple reference in the Epistle to the Galatians, it would be an extreme inference to conclude that she bore no

testimony to the birth and childhood of her son. Both Matthew and Luke must have obtained information from somebody. But from whom?

The personal pronoun "us" in Luke's preface should not be overlooked. It has reference to those designated in verse one, that is, members of the Church whose history reached back to Pentecost. These facts which had been delivered in catechetical instruction were the same which Luke declared he had accurately investigated from their beginning in order that there should be no doubt as to the "certainty" of the things he was to relate. For he did not first begin his Gospel and seek verification of its statements afterward, or as he went along. He began his inquiries, as the perfect participle "having traced" shows, and gathered together his information from various sources before he entered upon the formal task of arranging his material and writing his Gospel. With this in view, he begins with the birth of John the Baptist and from that starting point proceeds to the birth of Jesus.

Now, it is not likely that, having investigated all things from the beginning, the evangelist would have included the account of the virgin birth of our Lord in his Gospel among those things firmly established as a matter of belief in the Christian community, if that had not been the case. Especially would this be true since there were those who could contradict him then living at the time Luke wrote his Gospel, members of the Church in Jerusalem, or at Antioch, where the Church had been composed originally of believers who had been expelled from Jerusalem. Luke was probably a member of the Church in Antioch. Eusebius[47] says Luke hailed from there. Barnabas went to Antioch from Jerusalem and resided there. Through him as well as from others who had moved from Jerusalem

[47] *History*, Chap. IV.

to Antioch Luke could have learned all that was known to the Jerusalem Church.

> Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the Church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they should cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the Church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. And in those days came prophets from Jerusalem and Antioch.[48]

It will be noted, and due emphasis will be laid upon the fact, that Paul also resided in Antioch a whole year, and that prophets came there from Jerusalem preaching and strengthening the Church. It is difficult to imagine that a whole year could have passed without anything having been said or taught of the birth and childhood of Jesus. Was it here and at this time that Paul learned the full details of the life of Jesus?

[48] Acts ii. 19-27.

In this connection it is worthy of note that Ignatius, who suffered martyrdom under Trajan 107 A. D., was the Bishop of this Antiochian Church at that time, that is, about thirty-seven years after the fall of Jerusalem. He certainly knew the belief, whatever it may have been, of that Church from its beginning. Since he must have known those whose parents or relatives were members of the Church in those early apostolic days, he would have found out during the period of his ministry and episcopate that this faith had been held all those years up to the time of his death. Now, we know from his Epistle to the Ephesians, accepting it in its shorter form as among those Epistles generally accounted as genuine, that he believed and preached the doctrine of the virgin birth.[49]

The simple fact that confronts us is that Barnabas and all the other disciples and prophets and teachers who went from Jerusalem to Antioch must have perfectly known the belief held in the Jerusalem Church concerning the birth of our Lord. If we say that Luke must have learned from these disciples in the course of a whole year's acquaintance the true history of our Lord's nativity, it is easy to understand why he should begin at the beginning and incorporate what he had learned in his Gospel. On the contrary supposition that those disciples knew nothing of the matter and that their belief was that Jesus had been born in a natural manner, it is exceeding strange, to say the least, that Luke should have written such an account of that birth, of which nobody knew anything, as we find in his Gospel. After his statement that he had critically investigated everything from the beginning this would be even more strange.

There is nothing strained in this line of reasoning. The record in Acts xi. compels us to face this problem, which resolves itself into no problem at all if we accept the most

[49] Eph. xviii.

natural conclusion, namely, that within the period involved the virgin birth was known to the Church in Jerusalem. It does, however, become an insoluble problem if we assume that this great body of Christians which included teachers and prophets from the parent Church in Jerusalem, where apostles and disciples were still living who had known the Lord, had carried on their church life for a whole year and never discussed nor even heard of the circumstances of the Lord's birth.

Contrary to what seems to be the natural conclusion, it may still be held that Luke learned nothing in the course of a whole year from those representatives, and regardless even whether or not he intended at that time to write a history of the Christian beginnings, he must have obtained his information at *some other time from some other source.* Whatever the knowledge gained by him from other sources, it is again a strain upon our credulity to believe that these disciples from Jerusalem would be ignorant of the same facts. Since it was within the circle of the Church in Jerusalem only that the facts were known, it must have been somehow from members of that company that Luke obtained the facts he recorded.

CHAPTER II

OBJECTIONS

MYTHICAL THEORY

If the chain of fact and inference presented in the preceding chapter be accepted, St. Paul can be immediately connected with the Jerusalem Church and his knowledge of its religious belief taken for granted. On this basis it would not be difficult to prove that the silence of St. Paul concerning the virgin birth is no evidence of his ignorance of it. But since much that has been favored in the foregoing pages has been denied or ignored, and so many objections to the historical fact of the virgin birth have been raised and these by scholars who are by no means irresponsible in their methods of inquiry, it seems necessary that these objections, or at least the principal ones, should be considered before proceeding on the basis of Paul's actual knowledge. For, if these objections are valid, certainly no one would care to take the stand that Paul had knowledge of facts which were not matters of public knowledge in his day.

Criticism advanced against the historicity of the narratives in Matthew and Luke based on denial of the miraculous will not here be considered. A discussion of the miraculous does not fall within the scope of our inquiry. Whether the birth stories in Matthew and Luke are miraculous, historical or legendary in character, is of no concern in this investigation. The simple question here is, *Did Paul know of them?*

We may say, however, in passing, that to affirm the freedom of the human spirit in a world governed by necessity, that is, by unchangeable law, in the one breath, and

with the next to deny freedom of action to the Infinite Spirit, the Omnipotent God, is poor philosophy. Materialistic science may go contrary to human experience and insist that mind itself is under the same law of neecssity as matter. But even a Haeckel knows that he need not preach his Monism unless he wishes to do so. The human mind is free. It is free not only to act as the hands on a watch-dial are compelled to act, but free also to take the opposite course, if it so chooses. But observe that this freedom is itself a miracle in the sense of a tremendous exception, as yet unaccounted for, to the law of uniformity in a universe which is governed solely, as materialists affirm, by unchangeable law. If, then, the human will is free, is the Omnipotent Will fixed and unmovable? Is it conceivable that the Omnipotent is so extremely limited by the laws of his own making that He can neither suspend, change nor in any way alter or modify the existing modes of action in a universe of which every atom and every vibration of every atom depend for existence upon the constant energy of that Will?

An omnipotent God limited beyond recall in any sense is a contradiction in thought. For if limited against his will He cannot be omnipotent, and if not omnipotent He cannot be God, since that which is limited against its will is less than that which imposes the limitation and therefore is less than God supreme or an infinite God, unconditioned and absolute. All philosophical theories about the relativity of God amount to a condition imposed on God, and are equally self-contradictory, if taken seriously, that is, if the terms used are understood in any precise sense. In Holy Scripture, God himself resents the imposition of limitation of any kind. "Yea, they turned back and tempted God and limited [Tavah—marked off] the Holy One of Irsael."[1] They challenged the power of God.

[1] Ps. lxxviii. 41.

Limitation is one thing, self-restraint is another. Self-restraint is an act of freedom from within. Limitation is restraint imposed from without.

In the last analysis, what is the source of energy or force in the universe if it is not omnipotent will in action? All energy, whether human or divine, is will-power. Where there is no will there is no energy or force, and therefore no movement. That infinite will is free. It bears a relation to the universe conceivably similar, though infinitely more intimate, to that which the finite human will bears to the human body. *To deny, therefore, the possibility of miracles is to deny the freedom of God.* The affirmation that miracles have happened, logically speaking, is another question. Because God can work miracles it does not follow that He has therefore done so. The settlement of that issue is solely a question of evidence. This is denied. But to affirm that evidence sufficient to establish the fact of miracles is impossible to procure, since it is more probable that the testimony should be mistaken than that the laws of nature should be broken, or that evidence which contradicts human experience cannot be admissible is to beg the whole question in debate. How do we know that the laws of nature are broken in the case of miracles? To affirm that they are is to assume that we know all that there is to know about nature. If miracles happen, why should they not be the results of forces acting upon nature's materials? To assume that matter is absolutely irresponsive to any other than the manipulations familiar to us is to assume more than science, if indeed it has any right to enter this domain at all, will pretend to assume.

Natural laws are not entities, things in themselves, self-existent. They are methods, modes, by which things are done. Whether a hitherto unknown mode of action has occurred is a question of evidence. To hold that such

evidence must be contrary to human experience is illogical, a putting of the cart before the horse, since unless human experiences is a closed book it must be subject to addition, and every fresh addition the first time it occurs is contrary to previous experience, which it is affirmed it cannot be. To judge human experience on one level by human experience on any other level is irrational. An item of experience taken from any period in human history may be contrary to the experience of men of the present, but that does not render it unhistorical or impossible. That the virgin birth, if it occurred, involved the least possible violation of familiarly known natural law, may well be the verdict in the light of Darwin's chapter on "Parthenogenesis in Changes in Plants and Animals Under Demonstration," although there is no evidence extant of parthenogenesis among mammalia.

The chief objections against trusting the narrative of the virgin birth which we shall consider are:

(1) That it is purely mythical in character; that is, it did not originate in Palestinian Christian circles, but on Gentile soil.

(2) That it is a theological development based upon a misinterpretation of Isaiah vii. 14.

(3) That the accounts given of it in Matthew and Luke are interpolations.

These three are the principal exceptions current. Let us consider them in order.

(1) Wernle is of the opinion that "the myth sprang up amongst Gentile Christians. A great portion of the old Jewish Christians rejected it and rightly so for it did away with the descent from David which was a matter of such importance to them."[2]

Wernle is typical. It is not necessary, therefore, to cite the numerous other writers of his school who agree with

[2] *Beginnings of Christianity*, Vol. II, p. 117.

him. The bobbing up of this ever-recurring myth-hypothesis will be nothing new to readers of historical literature. Long ago David Frederic Strauss, in his once celebrated *Leben Jesu*, worked out the whole theory with reference to the Gospels with patience and skill, but better scholarship and saner views have since laid the mythical theory low. It may not be wholly a digression, however, if a word is said here concerning mythology, since some recent biblical scholars make much use of it in their Old Testament studies, and also in their attempts to explain the beginnings of Christian thought and belief.

Ruskin,[8] the celebrated art critic, once gave some charming lectures on Grecian myths, and showed in his exquisite manner what wonderful and beautiful meanings were contained, like butterflies in cocoons, in these ancient stories of the gods. Ruskin was a past-master in the use of English. Such is the beauty of his style, the surprising wealth of his fancy, the richness of his diction and the fervor of his poetic feeling, that one is in real danger of being lured under the spell of his genius into the belief that these hoary myths did really contain all that Ruskin reads into them. But Ruskin was not the first to credit these myths with possessing what his inventive faculty dictated. The early Stoics and later the Neo-Platonists, ashamed of the depraved character of their rabble of gods and goddesses, endeavored with varying skill and success to explain away the licentious deeds of these libidinous deities by turning these stories into religious and philosophical alle-

[8] Certainly I do not forget Max Muller's Lectures on Mythology, nor should the modern interpreter of ancient myths neglect to read his letter to Sir George Cox: "Mythology no doubt springs from scattered tales, and to simple tales it should be reduced before we attempt to explain it. This is what I thought so particularly happy in your book, that you should have told the tales [Sir George Cox had written a volume, *The Tales of Thebes and Argos*] simply, as they might have been told by any grandmother in any small village of Greece long before the encyclopædic treatment of Greek fable began" (*Life and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 284). Muller's Lectures were delivered Nov. 9, 1863; Ruskin's, March 9, 1869. For a characteristic letter from Carlyle on these, see *Life and Letters of Ruskin* by Collingwood.

gories. The same method, not so very new therefore after all, is now applied by certain biblical critics to the mythology of the Babylonians, and a Cheyne, a Gunkel, a Delitzsch or a Schmiedel will not hesitate to make out that these myths contain the germs of Christian faith.

In order to justify such methods of interpretation and such artificial making over of religious history, a new definition of myth has been invented, or rather the old has been revised, for a myth is now looked upon as originally a pictorial representation of an idea, the form or outward expression of a religious concept.[4]

Nor would we contend that such definition should be ruthlessly set aside as unworthy of serious consideration. Despite prejudice to the contrary, it is possible after all that in his infinite wisdom and in accord with his evolutionary method of human education in things religious shown in the gradual unfolding of his revelation in the Scriptures, God did employ the myth in the early dawn of history as a vehicle for imparting divine truth. We can imagine also that the Messianic idea might have been implanted germlike in the ancient stories of the conflicts between the evil gods opposed to man's well-being and the good gods who would deliver him from the malevolent powers bent upon his destruction, as is illustrated by the Babylonian myth in which Marduk, the Deliverer or Savior, finally overcomes Tiamat, the god of chaos and all evil. In the Old Testament, according to some biblical scholars, echoes of these ancient myths occur, and such writers as Professors Gunkel and Pfleiderer undertake to point out the part these myths played in certain statements in the New Testament, especially in the Apocalypse.

But if this was the real, the original purpose of myth, so understood by both the people and the myth-makers,

[4] Osterly, *The Evolution of the Messianic Idea*, p. 12.

what marvelous knowledge of nature, what astonishing intuitions concerning religious truth not to be openly revealed until future ages, these myth-makers must have had! The virgin birth of Jesus, his conflict with evil powers, his death, resurrection and ascension, are all of them apparent now that we are able to decode them from the stories of Marduk and Tiamat, or of Isis, Istar, Attis and Adonis! Pfleiderer is of the opinion that "the story of the dragon pursuing the child in Rev. xii. 3-5 is a recast of the Greek myth [transmitted by Hyginus] of the great dragon Pytho pursuing the pregnant Leto to destroy her, because of a prophecy that the son of Leto would slay him." "Evidently [Cheyne quotes him thus in his *Bible Problems*] this myth stands in some historical connection with the description in Rev. xii." The idea which these writers seek to convey is that intimations of the historic facts in the life of our Lord are somehow the development of ideas contained in these ancient myths, or that events related of the life of our Lord are but conscious adaptations of these stories.

The wonder is that the eminent scholars who argue thus from crude resemblances or false analogies did not, before becoming so thoroughly committed to them, consult to more advantage the arguments in the writings of the Early Church, which supply ample evidence of the falsity of these notions. Their refutation of these wild conjectures is complete. The resemblances which Cheyne, Pfleiderer and others point out were daily commonplaces, but they were no embarrassments to the early Christian apologists. Is it possible that Mithraism was the source of the Christian sacraments? And yet where will you find closer analogies than those between Mithraic rites and Christian rites? How could these analogies have escaped the attention of the Christian Fathers? Referring to this very Mithraic worship, Tertullian writes: "The devil

baptizes certain folk, and his believers and faithful ones, promising remission of sins after baptism. And if I still recollect aright, Mithra there sets a mark on the forehead of his soldiers, celebrates the oblation of bread, introduces a symbol of the resurrection and wins a crown under the sword. And what are we to say of Satan restricting his high-priest to one marriage? The devil too has his virgins and chaste celibates."[5]

If, therefore, our modern interpreters of myths, who follow the method of Greek philosophers in holding that profound ideas find picture presentation in myths, really mean what they say, the prophets of Israel must have been mere babes in comparison with these ancient myth-makers in the knowledge of God's thought concerning human redemption. For if these myths really teach what these interpreters assert is contained in them, inspiration must have participated in their origin to an extent that it imparted to them a prophetic character. The redemption of man from the powers of darkness by One who shall enter into conflict with these powers, the death, resurrection, and return of that One to the high heavens, are in no degree whatever so clearly delineated or even hinted at in any book or prophecy of the Old Testament concerning the Messiah as they are set forth on this theory in these ancient myths of Marduk and Osiris in Babylonian and Egyptian mythology.

The drama of redemption sponsored by the myth-makers far surpasses in detail that of the prophets of Israel. In view of their relative worth in this respect one might suggest (if he were inclined to be facetious) that, since these beautiful myths which date from man's early intellectual awakening constitute clear pictorial representations coinciding at so many points with what Christ Jesus, the Messianic Deliverer, should do and experience in

[5] *On Prescription Against Heretics*, Chap. XL., Eng. Trans.

future ages, a place should be found for these wonderful Babylonian myths and legends alongside the prophecies of Isaiah, for example, as a fit addition to the revelation of God to the people of Israel! So inferior is Old Testament revelation made to appear on this reading to these "old wives' stories"!

The simple truth is that the version of the religious history of humanity invented by certain scholars in order to furnish better ground and support for their theories is not at all in harmony with the actual course of the development of idolatry as it can be traced in the literature and archeology of the pre-Christian period. The farther back we go up the stream of history, the simpler become religion and religious thought. St. Paul is a better philosopher than are these modern mythologists. To him the course of the religious history of humanity is not an ascending but a descending one. Primitive man in Paul's thought was not devoid of capacity for reason. He was not a blind, stupid, mindless savage, shut off from all real knowledge of God. These ancient myths on their own testimony are the products of ages of growth. From the beginning man possessed a knowledge of God; some cared for and retained it, but others neglected it and lost it in the easily understandable way that man or race may lose it today.

> Because that when they knew God they glorified him not as God neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things; who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator who is blessed forever, Amen. And even as

> they did not like to retain God in their knowledge God gave them over to a reprobate mind to do those things which are not convenient.[6]

Did the prophets of Israel detect anything divine in these myths? That they were well acquainted with these pagan stories modern mythologists must admit, for they insist that numerous myths are scattered through the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. Now, the fact is the Hebrew prophets detected no such divine meanings in these stories. On the contrary, the attitude of Israel's teachers toward them is one of derision and contempt, for they well know it is not possible to let everyday mortals cling to the stories of the gods and expect them at the same time to drop the worship of them altogether.

Did the original authors of these myths intend to use them as a vehicle for divine ideas?

> The word myth (mythos, fabula, story) in its original meaning [says Grote] signified a statement or current narrative, without any connotative implication either of truth or falsehood. . . . Its value or interest depended upon the poetic genius of the composer. Later on in the intellectual development of Greece the myths were looked at from a point of view completely foreign to the reverential curiosity and liberal imaginative faith of the Homeric man: they were broken up and recast in order to force them into new molds such as their authors had never conceived. Pindar repudiates some stories and transforms others, because they are inconsistent with his conception of God.[7]

Other poets, such as Aeschylus and Sophocles, did likewise. Plato saw nothing in myths but good or bad poetic

[6] Rom. i. 21.
[7] *History of Greece*, Vol. I.

fancies, nor would he tolerate their indiscriminate circulation in his *Republic*. "First of all, then," he says, "it seems, we must exercise control over the fable [myth] makers; and whatever beautiful fable they may invent, we should select, and what is not we should reject. . . . Those which both Hesiod and Homer told us, and other poets also; for they composed and related false fables for mankind and do still relate them. . . . These fables, said he, are indeed injurious. Neither are they to be told in our State."[8]

Nor did Cicero see anything divine in myths such as criticism carried to extremes by the Neo-Platonists now sees in them. In his *Nature of the Gods* he says:

> Thus far have I been rather exposing the dreams of dotards than giving the opinion of philosophers. Not much more absurd than these are the fables of the poets, who owe all their power of doing harm to the sweetness of their language; who have represented the gods as enraged with anger and inflamed with lust; who have brought before our eyes their wars, battles, combats, wounds; their hatreds, dissensions, discords, births, deaths, complaints and lamentations; their adulteries, their chains, their amours with mortals; and mortals begotten by immortals. To these idle and ridiculous flights of poets we may add the prodigious stories invented by the Magi and by the Egyptians also, which were of the same nature.[9]

Some of these poetic writers, it is true, endeavored to turn certain of these ancient myths into allegories. But Cotta, one of Cicero's character, ridicules their efforts to invest these fictions with secondary, hidden meanings,

[8] Bk. II.
[9] Bk. I, c. xvi.

pointing out how "any quality also in which there were any virtue was nominated a Deity."[10]

The New Testament has no part or lot in this work of trying to find something divine in these myths. Such a conception of them was wholly foreign to the thought of its writers. Paul in his First Epistle to Timothy exhorts him to warn the members of the Church at Ephesus, where the temple of Diana was located, not to "give heed to fables and endless genealogies." And in admonishing Timothy himself to refuse to listen to old-womanish or silly fables,[11] he adds, "for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts they shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables [myths].[12] The writer of II Peter declares, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables [myths] when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses [saw with our own eyes] of his glory."[13] Since Paul, it is certain, was in almost uninterrupted contact with all the forms of pagan worship current in the Roman Empire—the Mithras religion from Persia which had its seat at Tarsus, his birthplace, and the various cults of Adonis, Attis and Osiris in Hither Asia[14]—he was therefore competent to estimate these "fables" and "endless genealogies" at their true value. He it was who earnestly exhorted the Church at Thessalonica "to prove all things," i. e., to subject everything to the test of rigid analysis and then only to "keep that which is good."

Anyone who doubts whether Paul had an intimate knowledge of the myths and "mysteries" in circulation

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[10] *Nat. of the Gods*, Bk. II.
[11] iv. 7.
[12] II Tim. iv. 3, 4.
[13] i. 14.
[14] See H. A. A. Kennedy, *St. Paul and the Mystery Religious;* also Sir William Ramsay, *The Teachings of St. Paul*, etc.

and practiced in his day, should read Col. ii. 18 and then turn to the remarkable chapter on the "Relation of Paul to Greek Mysteries" in Ramsay's priceless work, *The Teaching of Paul in Terms of the Present Day.* His treatment more than any other in present-day literature shows that these pagan myths were unable to withstand the keen scrutiny of the apostle and were denied by him any place whatever in Christian thought and teaching.

Every student who is at all acquainted with the writings of the Fathers, the Apologies of those Christian writers who themselves came out of heathenism, will recall the terrific scorn with which they ridicule the introduction of the myths of the gods into the farces and scurrilous plays of the age. So shameful was the vileness of the gods and goddesses, surpassing, indeed, that of the grossest libertines of earth, that some philosophers endeavored to soften their discreditableness by the use of allegory, but their Christian neighbors knew how idle all this whitewashing was and that these new portraits of the gods depended for their existence solely on the imagination of their creators. They not only refused to admit the existence of deep and profound mystery unknown to the multitude, thus assumed to be present in these fables, but they laughed the philosophic attempts to get the public to believe it to scorn. "The very compositions of your poets," writes Justin Martyr, who was himself a philosopher, "are monuments to madness and intemperance. . . . But since Homer, Hesiod wrote his Works and Days, who will believe his driveling theology?"[15]

After Athenagoras has pointed out wickednesses and absurdities in these myths he makes his opponent say, in anticipation, as it were, of the line of argument of some modern writers:

All these stories which seem to you disgraceful and

[15] *Dis. to Greeks,* I, 11.

> tending to the discredit of the gods, contain in them holy mysteries, theories wonderful and profound, and not such as any one can easily become acquainted with by force of understanding. For that is not meant and said, which has been written and placed on the surface of the story; but all these things are understood in allegorical senses, and by means of secret explanations privately supplied.

To this plea of the defense Athenagoras replies:

> These are all quirks, as is evident, and quibbles with which they are wont to bolster up weak cases before a jury, nay rather, to speak more truly, they are pretenses, such as are used in sophistical reasonings, by which not the truth is sought after, but always the image, and appearance and shadow of the truth. For because it is shameful and unbecoming to receive as truth the correct accounts you have recourse to this expedient, that one thing should be substituted for another and that what was in itself shameful should, in being explained, be forced into the semblance of decency.

By his exposé of the practice of whitewashing these myths, this Christian apologist shows himself to be in accord with Cicero, who in commenting on the deeds of the gods says: "All these opinions arise from old stories spread in Greece; the belief in which, Balbus, you well know ought to be stopped, lest religion should suffer. But you Stoics, so far from refuting them, even give them authority by the mysterious sense which you pretend to find in them."[16]

To affirm then, as Wernle does, without producing the slightest evidence that the story of the birth of Christ

[16] *Nat. of the Gods*, XXIII.

from a virgin originated as a myth among Gentile Christians may serve as a convenient loophole of escape from pressing difficulties, but it is not scholarship. Theories, no matter how strong the insistence, do not make good substitutes for evidence. In what part of the Roman Empire, we have a right to ask, did these Gentile Christians in question live? and when did they invent or compile and devise this beautiful myth from the debris of pagan legends?

If the claim be made that they lived in the apostolic period, it will leave the unaccountable fact on our hands that Paul in his travels in all parts of the Empire, as far as his Epistles testify, ran upon no trace of this Gentile myth which, on this theory, was entrenching itself in Christian circles. There is no other known nascent belief antagonistic to the Gospel—whether Jewish Legalism, Gnosticism or one and another form of false philosophy—no social sin or religious discord among the Gentile Churches, that Paul does not know and does not rebuke. Here is a myth said to be in circulation that is closely related to right thinking upon the person of Jesus, an account of his birth made out of whole cloth that can be interpreted almost in contradiction to Paul's own teaching, and not only is it not branded by him as an interloper in the Church of God but he does not even mention it.

Every writer opposed to the acceptance of belief in the virgin birth stoutly insists that the silence of Paul in his Epistles concerning it is good evidence that such a belief was unknown to him and to the primitive Church. Granted that this argument is sound in principle, what conclusion ought to be drawn from his silence concerning this alleged Gentile myth, this extraordinary addition to the faith embodied in the Gospel that is said to have developed a sudden vogue in the Gentile Churches? It stands to reason that those who use the "argument from

silence" on Paul's part as ground for non-acceptance of the belief of the Church in the virgin birth should not suddenly become blind to its force nor obtuse to its pertinency when it is turned against the acceptance of belief in the Gentile myth we have been discussing. Paul's silence concerning an alleged Gentile Christian myth which never acquired any standing among Jewish Christians calls for an accounting as much as his silence concerning the belief in the virgin birth which, it is acknowledged, prevailed in the primitive Church.

Furthermore, in view of the constant communication back and forth among these early Churches, as the New Testament makes plain, it would seem to be well-nigh impossible for this alleged myth to spring up in one Gentile Christian group situated in Asia or Pamphylia or Macedonia, at Antioch, Ephesus, Thessalonica or anywhere else, and spread to others without Luke, or Silas, or Barnabas, or any of the co-workers of Paul learning of its existence. Church leaders like these who were going to and fro among the Gentile Churches were also in constant communication with the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Yet we are asked to believe that the story of the virgin birth did not originate in the Jerusalem Church, but in a pagan myth, taken over by various Gentile Churches —all myths were abhorrent to Jewish feeling and religious faith—and that in spite of such a parentage men like Silas, Barnabas or Paul failed to oppose it openly as a pagan adulteration of true apostolic teaching which degrades the incarnation of the Son of God to the base level characteristic of the stories of the gods.

Nor is it easy to understand, nor does it seem possible to establish the hypothesis, that if Luke knew that this myth (a) was not indigenous to Christian faith, (b) rested on no foundation at all in actual fact, (c) formed no part of that which had been handed down to him by

those who were "eye-witnesses" of Jesus' life, but was only a product pure and simple of Gentile poetic feeling, he would still have used it at the very beginning of his Gospel as if it were the foundation of all he had to tell concerning the life of Jesus. This is not to say, of course, that it is unbelievable that miracle stories, local superstitions and other like spiritual dreams might have become mingled in back districts of remote provinces of the empire with some half-understood Christian doctrine, and afterward zealously defended by the Church at large. It is quite possible also that certain of their former pagan deities suffered a change of status and came to have the standing, in the minds of ignorant peasants, of Christian saints. The cult of Isis and Horus in Egypt might have developed in the end among only half-converted and ignorant Christian peasants into the worship of Mary (the mother of Jesus) as "the Mother of God," an appellation so vigorously but vainly denounced by Nestorius. Even so, what has all this to do with the historical truth as to the roots of the belief in the virgin birth? As Lord Acton wrote in a letter to Mary Gladstone: "A disposition to detect resemblances is one of the greatest sources of error."[17] The results may be entertaining, but the examples provided even by some eminent scholars should be sufficient to check further indulgence in this mischievous pastime. If there is one thing more than another that a student of history should carefully guard against, it is that chaos of thought which is the product of arguments based upon careless analogies.

Another difficulty with this theory of the origin of the virgin birth in a pagan myth is occasioned by *the time element*. Myths do not spring up overnight. They are a growth and much time, therefore, is required for their maturing and general acceptance. But the period that

[17] *Letters, etc.*, p. 177.

elapsed between the preaching to the Gentiles and the writing by Matthew and Luke of the Gospels which contain the birth story was in nowise adequate for such a myth to have become full grown and widely accepted among Gentile Churches.

The pertinent historical facts to which attention has been called and the inferences that have now been drawn from them are more than sufficient, we believe, to dispose of Wernle's theory that a pagan myth is the responsible source of the birth story. For those who say it did originate among Gentile Christians will have to admit that, even so, it must have been based either on the Christian preaching they had heard in person or on hearsay reports of it that had reached them. It certainly was not devoid of antecedents altogether. But who was the preacher to these Gentiles, and who founded these Gentile Churches, if not St. Paul himself? And if this alleged myth grew out of a misunderstanding of Paul's teaching—assuming that he ever instructed his Gentile converts in detail of the biography of Jesus—as, for instance, the Thessalonians misapprehended his instruction concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus and the resurrection of the dead, why was it that Paul never took pains to correct their mistake as he did the erroneous conclusions of the Thessalonians?

If, on the other hand, this supposed myth arose out of hearsay reports, vague rumors that gained currency among legend-loving Gentiles, what evidence can be brought forward to show that these reports, even so, were not true, i. e., were not based upon the very same narratives which both Matthew and Luke were collecting in Palestinian circles? As a matter of fact, as Harnack says, "Nothing that is mythological in the sense of Greek or Oriental myth is to be found in these accounts; all here is in the spirit of the Old Testament, and most of it reads like a passage from historical books of that ancient volume."

But these are not the only difficulties encountered by this myth theory of the virgin birth. Another disconcerting question confronts it: When did this "myth" arise?

If the story of the virgin birth was originally a Gentile myth, why should it have caused a division in the Jewish Christian Church during the apostolic period? How could it have created a situation so uncompromising that the successors or perpetuators of the Judaizing party, the Ebionites, separated on this very score from their fellow Christians? How otherwise is this separation to be accounted for? For Ebionitic belief, be it remembered, is *directly traceable* to the Judaizing element in Jerusalem. Strauss in his *Life of Jesus*, having shown that the genealogies of the ancestry of Jesus in Matthew belong to the time of the primitive Church, says: "Since in this way we discover both genealogies to be memorials belonging to the time and circle of the primitive Church in which Jesus was regarded as a naturally begotten man, the *Sect of the Ebionites* cannot fail to occur to us; as we are told concerning them that they held this view at this early period."[18]

This, it will be observed in passing, also fixes in a general way, as already indicated, *the time when* this belief in the virgin birth had become current in the Church and opposed by the Judaizing Christians. These Ebionites referred to by Strauss were successors to the old Jewish party in Jerusalem who, in loyalty to Moses, opposed Paul, and while accepting Jesus as the Messiah denied to the end his essential deity.

Now, this Jewish party could not have been born *before* Paul had begun his mission to the Gentiles and made his missionary report of the results to the apostolic conference in Jerusalem. No occasion existed for the rise of such a loyalist party prior to Paul's first venture into Gentile

[18] Eng. Trans., p. 148.

lands. This was about 47 A. D.[19] About that time, however, the pro-Jewish party originated which continued active in the Church till the Roman armies approached Jerusalem about 68 or 69 A. D. At that date, as Eusebius relates, Christians in Jerusalem and round about, remembering the warnings and predictions of Jesus[20] concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, fled to Pella[21] beyond the Jordan in Perea. No Christians were caught in the net which Titus drew around the doomed city. The Church had heeded the warning and found safety in the Bactanea from the horrors of the siege, and remained in this retreat until long after Jerusalem had fallen.

A second revolt of the Jews under Barchocheba during the early part of the reign of Hadrian brought upon them another terrible and most sweeping stroke of vengeance. They were now prohibited from even reentering the Holy City. In order to render this prohibition against the Jews effective, Hadrian erected a fane to Venus on the very site of the temple and placed over the Bethlehem gate an image of a pig, which no Jew would dare to approach lest he should be defiled. When the time came for the Church in exile to return to Jerusalem, the Ebionites, or Judaic element which still clung to the laws of Moses, were compelled, because of Hadrian's decrees and repressive measures, to separate from their fellow Jewish Christians who followed the teaching of Paul, and were not held back by scruples concerning pagan statues or Mosaic laws of defilement. These Pauline Jewish Christians joined the Gentile Christians in the new colony, Aelia Capitolina,[22] which Hadrian had built on the ruins of Jerusalem and, by this

[19] All dates are tentative. For a careful study of dates in Paul's life see Harnack, *Chronologies;* Weiseler, *Chronology of the Apostolic Age,* Eng. Trans.; Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveler;* Lightfoot, *Biblical Essays;* Lewin, *Fasti Sacri;* Turner in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible.*

[20] Luke xxi. 22.

[21] *Ecclesiastical History,* Vol. III, pp. 5-8.

[22] See Neander, *History of the Christian Religion During the Three First Centuries,* p. 233; Milman, *History of Christianity,* Bk. II, Chap. II.

absolute abandonment of the ceremonial law of Moses, completed the separation. Thus was the primitive Church forever divided. It split on the question of Christ and the virgin birth.

The Ebionite party continued its existence for some time, still clinging to Moses as the Lawgiver, and to Jesus as the Messiah, but denying the faith of the Church in his divinity. Throughout the second and third centuries and, even dragging on into the fourth, this dwindling sect, which still contended for the belief of their ancestors in the natural genealogy of Jesus, was finally lost in the shallows of history and forgotten. "At the end of the second century," says Ernest Renan, "these good sectaries, having remained beyond the great current which had carried away other churches, were treated as heretics [Ebionites] and a pretended heresiarch Ebion was invented to explain their name."[23]

Milman[24] also remarks that "the rest of the Judaic Christian community at Pella, and in its neighborhood, sank into an obscure sect, distinguished by their obstinate rejection of the writings of Paul, and by their own Gospel, most probably the original Hebrew of St. Matthew." Since the Gospel of Matthew, rejected by the Ebionites, contained the story of the virgin birth, because that was the part unacceptable to them, this constitutes clear evidence, it would seem, that our version of Matthew was written before the year 70 A. D. It is impossible to reject the unborn.

It is plain, therefore, that the rejection of the virgin birth by this Judaizing party in Jerusalem is good evidence that it was known to the Church at that time. It is easy, of course, to affirm in the face of this evidence that

[23] "A la fin du 1 le siècle ces bons sectaires demeurés en dehors où grand courant qui avait emporté les autres Eglises, sont traités d'heretiques, Ebionites, et ont inventé pour expliquer leur nom un pretendu heresiarque ebion" (*Vie de Jesus*, p. 189).

[24] *History of Christianity*, Bk. II, Chap. II.

it was not known to these Judaizers after the fall of Jerusalem; that all who had opposed Paul had passed away before the invasion of Palestine by the Roman armies; or that the last of that generation who had opposed him went with the Church into Perea.

Even so, these assumptions will not carry much weight in view of the short period that elapsed between Paul's day and the flight of the Church from Jerusalem. Paul suffered martyrdom in 64 A. D. Colossians, among the last Epistles which he wrote, gives no evidence that the Judaizing party which had persecuted him through his entire ministry were at that time all dead. At all events, available evidence demonstrates beyond a doubt that the distinctive beliefs of those Ebionites who separated from the main body of the Church do date back unbroken and unchanged to Paul's day and to the day of the apostles. The siege of Jerusalem began 69 or 70 A. D. The united Church in Jerusalem fled from the city at that time. Paul was executed about 64 A. D. How brief the span, then, that separated these Ebionites from Paul's day and the beliefs of the Jewish party of that time in Jerusalem and elsewhere! On this very point we may note that Harnack states,[25] "every belief which at that time [that is, the end of the first century or the beginning of the second] was the common property of the Christians [including the Palestinian Churches] must be traced back to the Churches of Palestine, and must be ascribed to the first decades after the resurrection." How much more would this be true of the beliefs of the period immediately succeeding the destruction of Jerusalem!

Nor does it in anywise solve the difficulty to assume that the belief in the virgin birth arose *after* the Jewish War, that is, later than 70 A. D., since the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, or Luke's at any rate, had already

[25] *Date of the Acts, etc., p. 148.*

been published prior to that event. The narrative of the virgin birth was certainly included in both of these Gospels. It appears, therefore, unwarrantable to assign the origin of the virgin birth story to so late a period. The results of the most recent criticism on the various dates suggested for the book of Acts indicate that Acts was written before the year 70 A. D., even before the death of Paul, 64 A. D. This is undoubtedly the correct inference, since, if Acts was written after Paul's death, there would be no way of accounting for the remarkable fact that Luke makes no mention in Acts of such an important event, but Paul is still preaching in Rome when he closes his record.[26] Harnack says, "St. Luke's absolute silence concerning everything that happened between the years 64 and 70 A. D. is a strong argument for the hypothesis that the book was written before the year 64 A. D."[27]

But Luke's Gospel, which contains the story of the virgin birth, was written long before Acts was written by him.

With all the data of previous critical investigation before him, Harnack states: "Since then there are no other reasons for a later date it follows that the strong arguments which favor the composition of the Acts before 70 A. D. now already apply in their full force to the Gospel of St. Luke, *and it seems now to be established beyond question that both books of this great historical work were written while St. Paul was still alive.*"[28]

This, then, seems to dispose of the assumption of a late origin for the story of the virgin birth. It was not an invention either of those Christians, Jewish or Gentile, who went out from Jerusalem before the destruction of the city or of those who returned to it afterward, nor of any

[26] See Ramsay, *The Teaching of St. Paul*, etc., p. 346, for an exhaustive treatment of the subject.
[27] *Dates of the Acts*, etc., p. 100.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 124.

body of Christians later. The Ebionites who rejected the belief were an offshoot of the Judaizing element in Jerusalem, and therefore it was in Jerusalem and among the Judaizing party in the Church that antagonism to the belief originated. This confirms again our own conclusion, already stated, that the belief in the virgin birth had its origin in Jerusalem and that it was not a product of Gentile-Christian fancy.

In further proof of this conclusion, if further proof is needed, and in accord with Harnack's statement, we must seek a period antedating the last years of Paul's life for the beginning of Luke's narrative. Luke was the traveling companion of St. Paul. But Luke was in no position while journeying with the apostle from place to place, far away from the scenes of Jesus' earthly life, to gather materials for his Gospel. What was there to gather in Pamphylia or Macedonia? Such materials by the very nature of the case could be obtained only in Palestine amid scenes of the Gospel he was preparing to write, from the members of the primitive Church who knew the facts. Luke had to examine those who were "eye-witnesses." Paul was martyred in 64 A. D. It is probable, therefore, that Luke was assembling his material and working on his Gospel when with Paul at Caesarea, 57-59 A. D.[29]

Probably Luke lived in the house of Philip, the evangelist, at Caesarea, and was thus within easy reach of Gospel scenes. It is evident, however, that he must have begun collecting his material a long while even before that date. If this is true, as seems to be the case, it leads to the same conclusion at which many critics of New Testament writers have already arrived, namely, that the narratives in Matthew and Luke date back to the very beginning

[29] "And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came to Caesarea and we entered into the house of Philip, the Evangelist, which was one of the seven, and abode with him" (Acts xxi. 8). See Meyer, Commentary, *in loc.*; Acts xxiii. 23. See Conybeare and Howson, *Life and Epistles of St. Paul;* and Lewin, *Life and Epistles*, Vol. II, p. 692.

of the primitive Church. Necessarily, then, the story of the virgin birth must have been current at that early date.

It has been recently suggested, in order to meet and overcome certain linguistic difficulties, that Luke originally wrote his Gospel without any knowledge of the virgin birth, and later, having become better informed, interpolated certain words into his text which changed his original story, which, it is alleged, attributed a natural birth to Jesus, into the Gospel account of the supernatural birth. But even if such were the case the interpolation nevertheless was his own.

Whether this theory of an afterthought interpolation by Luke himself, for which there is no support, be true or not is immaterial to our present purpose of proving that the true story of Jesus' birth was known to the primitive Church. For if Luke was ignorant of the virgin birth when he began writing his Gospel, as this interpolation theory presupposes, the belief was, nevertheless, in existence among the members of the early Church. Otherwise he could not have learned of it later and inserted in his text the words in chapter i. 34, together with the whole narrative from the annunciation to the close.

Such a theory on its face forces Luke to contradict himself, for he clearly states in the prologue to his Gospel that the facts he is about to relate were already well known; that they were "most surely believed [*peplerophomenon,* fully established] among us"; that these facts were "delivered to us by those who were eyewitnesses" (*autoptai,* seeing with their own eyes); and that because they were authentic they were matters for catechetical instruction. At the very outset of his Gospel Luke states that, "Forasmuch as many have undertaken to set forth these things, it seemed good to me also [*parakolouthekoti anothen pasin akrivhos Kathezes*], having

accurately traced everything from the beginning, to write to thee Most Excellent Theophilus in an orderly manner that thou mayest know the certainty [*asphalein*] of the things in which thou hast been instructed." But according to this interpolation theory this was really not the case. Luke, it is inferred, had not traced *everything* accurately, but had overlooked one of the most tremendous facts of all, the supernatural birth of Christ, which, on becoming better informed, he inserted later. Writers may often supplement what they have already written with new material, but they do not leave an original declaration in such cases stand that they had traced with care *everything* concerning their subject from the beginning. Linguistic difficulties cannot legitimately be employed to upset all that Luke had written in his preface in the interest of a theory that he did not intend at first to write of the miraculous birth.

In finally disposing of the theory that the virgin birth story originated as a Gentile-Christian myth, which has now been proven to be an impossibility, those who study the Hebrew tone and character of the narrations in Matthew and Luke may rest content with the statement of Harnack—who in all fairness, it should be said, does not believe in the virgin birth—that "a story of the birth of our Lord that had grown up freely in Gentile soil about the year 50 or 80 or 100 A. D. would certainly have been of quite a different character from the story of the first Gospel." Even Lobstein, who holds that the Septuagint rendering of the Hebrew word *almah*, a young woman, by *parthenos*, a virgin, "paved the way for the religious construction adopted by the Evangelist," is compelled to reject the hypothesis that the birth story grew out of a myth originating outside Jewish influences.

No Gentile could by any power of imagination have

invented the story as it is recorded in Matthew and Luke.[80]

The careful student of Scripture will observe that St. Luke's testimony is not to be limited to the bare statement of the birth itself. It must be taken to include all the circumstantial details narrated preceding the birth of Jesus, such as the visit of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth, the birth of John the Baptist and the intimate knowledge these holy women had of each other's experiences. The whole story as rendered by Luke produces the conviction that he was well aware of the extraordinary character of the events which he purposed to narrate, and although they were seemingly beyond human credibility—as for instance the exhortation of the Angel to Mary to have faith in God concerning the promise made to her—Luke nevertheless had carefully investigated them and was convinced of their truth. He says that the amazing announcement of the Angel to Mary was the impelling motive prompting her to journey all the way, even unaccompanied, from Nazareth to the hill country of Judea, probably to Hebron, the city of the priests, to visit her cousin Elizabeth. When she arrives she is greeted with the astonishing news that an Angel of God had promised her cousin Elizabeth a son also. Mary had known nothing of the divine promise to Zacharias months before. Elizabeth, on the other hand, had known nothing of the experience of Mary in far-off Nazareth. But both although far separated by distance had been chosen of God for a definite purpose, the one to become the mother in the course of nature of an extraordinary prophet, the other through supernatural means to give birth to a divine human being—who "shall be called the Son of the Highest."

There were many stories current among the Gentiles ascribing the birth of illustrious men to the agency of the

[80] Harnack says, "A Greek source cannot lie at the foundation of chapters i and ii of St. Luke's Gospel" (*Luke the Physician*, p. 215).

gods, but where did this interposition of a virgin originate? If invented it was something quite new in the common lore of mythology, for no birth under like circumstances was ever mentioned in the fables of the poets or the fairy tales of the myth-makers. What marvelous genius for embellishment the romancer must have had to add such circumstances as those said to attend the birth of the Baptist, the seemingly unrelated particular of the Angel standing at the "*right side* of the altar," the reference to the priestly *order* of Zacharias' course, which carries us back to the system prevailing in the daily service in the temple long before,[31] and which would have had no significance except to a Jew. With what care for particulars does he describe the *wonder* of the people that "he tarried so long in the temple"; the coming of the neighbors and kinsfolk, giving us unintentionally a glimpse of the social customs of the people. It is all so deftly woven, moreover, into the story of the birth of Jesus as to constitute with names, dates, place and incidents a complete history, a history so exact that had the supposed inventor erred even as to a date, had he, for instance, placed the date of Jesus' birth a year or even a few months prior to the death of Herod, March 4, B. C., the entire chronology, not only of the New Testament, but also of Roman and Jewish history as related to events in Palestine, would have to be revised.

That a Gentile, with a Gentile's mental background, could—without a Jewish model before him for a guide—divest himself sufficiently of his pagan bias of thought to be able to compose a narrative like this, so deeply colored with Jewish modes of thought, feelings and expressions, seems a psychological impossibility. For the composition of the virgin birth narrative is so distinctively Hebraic in character as compared with all else in Luke's Gospel that

[31] II Chron.

even an amateur critic might spy it out at once from its setting as an original document inserted by Luke.

Renan says the genealogies of Matthew are Hebraic; "the transcription of proper names are not from the Septuagint."[32] Johannes Weiss certifies to the Hebraic diction of Luke's record. Godet says the documents of Luke preserve as faithfully as possible an Aramaic color, *fidelment que possible le coloris arameen.*[33] Zahn also affirms the Hebraic character of the narrative and holds that it must have originated in Palestine among Jewish Christians. Dr. Mackintosh, in a recent work, states that the early chapters of Matthew and Luke are intensely Hebraic.

> They must have arisen in Palestinian circles. The attitude of the first century Christians to pagan tales regarding the celestial descent of Alexander the Great, Plato or Augustus can only have one of indignant horror. . . . Nor does it [that is, the evangelist's narrative] come to us divorced from the rest of the evangelic story by a long precarious interval of years. On the contrary, even so radical a critic as Johannes Weiss has expressed the view that the contents of Luke i. and ii. may have circulated in the Jewish-Christian communities of Judea in the sixties.[34]

If such a radical critic as Johannes Weiss makes this admission, then the theory that the story of the virgin birth was the product of myth-making Gentile-Christians must henceforth be considered, so far as New Testament criticism is concerned, as no longer tenable.

Before leaving this chief objection and hypothesis of Wernle, it may not be amiss to enter a protest against torturing the Greek text of Luke, as Dr. Theodor Keim[35]

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[32] See Canon Gore, *Dissertations*, Note, p. 29.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[34] *The Doctrines of the Person of Christ*, p. 530.
[35] *Jesus of Nazareth*, Vol. II, p. 46.

does, so as to force from it a suggestion of mythological ideas. Nothing could be further from the purpose either of Matthew or Luke or their sources than such a notion. The attempt of Keim to force the pagan conception of a god having intercourse with a woman—as in the fables of Alexander and Plato and others—into the Greek of St. Luke, is an illustration of a method which had better be avoided.

Keim says: "Luke following his source of information draws a more sensuous picture of the heavenly mystery; the Holy Ghost descended upon her [Mary]: the power of the Highest visibly overshadowed her in the form of a cloud in which the hidden God comes near to mortal men: the fruit of this proximity is the child she bears beneath her bosom."[36]

In justice to the Evangelist it should be noted that this misrepresentation of what he wrote is solely the invention of the learned Dr. Keim. Luke does not give any ground for Keim's romancing or contain the slightest suggestion that the power of God would be visible, or that a "cloud" containing the "hidden God" would overshadow the virgin. All this crude, coarse caricature is absolutely foreign to the declaration of the Angel and to the statement of the evangelist.

The verb *episkiadso* does signify, in the infinitive, "to overshadow." But this does not authorize Keim and others to cite as parallels to passages in Greek mythology such Scriptural ideas as that the Holy Ghost descended upon her; that the power of the Highest visibly "overshadowed her in the form of a cloud." Hebrew thought conceived of God creative, as God the Holy Spirit. This

[36] See Fuerst, *Lexicon*, 1286. Harnack notes the original conception "of the Holy Spirit" where "Spirit" in Semitic is of the feminine gender and therefore excludes all of the sexual. "Mythology is not only not forgotten in the Greek Gospel of Hebrews, but has in many other quarters set a bridle on the imagination" (*Date of the Acts*, etc., p. 45).

idea is present everywhere in the Hebrew Scriptures, but no Hebrew ever conceived of the Spirit of God *begetting*, as the Greeks declared of their gods. The very language of the people is at variance with such a conception, for in the Aramaic and Hebrew, "Spirit" is feminine.[36] Again, Spirit as power is not visible, nor has it shape or form "like a cloud."

Nor does Luke so report the promise of the angel (and be it remembered there are no angels in Greek or Roman mythology). Instead of suggesting relations between gods and men similar to those of mythology, this story of the virgin birth rather reminds us of Gen. i. 2, since the angel expressly declares that God will accomplish his will by his creative power, without the aid of man.

CHAPTER III

Misinterpretation

The second chief objection to the acceptance of the virgin birth contends that the narratives recorded by Matthew and Luke regarding it are not statements of fact, but rather the product of religious reflection and pious fancy based upon an erroneous interpretation of Isaiah vii. 14. This objection, it will be observed, differs in character from that of Wernle and the Mythologists, who seem to forget that *in all Grecian and Roman mythology no clear case occurs of birth from a virgin.*

The chief exponent of this second objection is the illustrious scholar, historian and critic, Adolf von Harnack, of Berlin. His theory is that the idea that Jesus was born of a virgin was a by-product of three chapters in the life of Jesus: (1) The energy of the Holy Ghost in raising Him from the dead. (2) The story of the transfiguration in which He was proclaimed by the voice from heaven to be the Beloved Son in whom God was well pleased. (3) The descent of the Spirit at the baptism.

Reflection upon these three occasions, says Harnack, would naturally raise the question: When did Jesus become the Son of God? Harnack's theory expressed in his own words is that the answer, "at his birth,"

> did not displace the three others [above] which maintained themselves in peaceful juxtaposition (indeed, they did not absolutely exclude one another seeing that it was a question of the outpouring of the Spirit which could happen again and again). However, the very fact that these views continued to exist

side by side is a guarantee that the new view was not an intruder from the sphere of heathen mythology, but a logical conclusion from the belief that our Lord was God's Son by the operation of the Holy Spirit. . . . But the conviction that our Lord was born of the Holy Spirit did not, according to Jewish ideas, involve the exclusion of an earthly father any more than an earthly mother, although "ruach" is feminine.

Hence one may, indeed must, cherish very serious doubts as to whether the idea of the virgin birth would have made its appearance on Jewish soil if it had not been for Isaiah vii. 14.[1]

This really amounts to a declaration that an erroneous interpretation of Isaiah vii. 14 was responsible for this belief in the virgin birth of our Lord; of a truth, it is alleged, there was no such birth. The accounts of Matthew and Luke were not recitals of facts, but mere fables that arose from the pious reflection that the Jesus who was raised by the Spirit from the dead, proclaimed by the Spirit as the Beloved Son and crowned by the Spirit on his baptism must have become the Son of God at his birth by the Spirit.

With this supposition of Harnack's, which does not account satisfactorily for the origin of either the doctrine itself or of the narratives recounting the birth, Paul Lobstein, Professor of Dogmatics in the University of Strasburg and the representative of French liberalism on this subject, is in substantial agreement:

The Greek translators of the Hebrew Bible rendered the word Almah which cannot mean virgin (Comp. Cant. vii. sq. and especially Prov. xxx. 19 sq.) by *Parthenos;* thus they paved the way for the

[1] *Date of the Acts, etc., pp.* 144, 145.

> religious construction adopted by the evangelist. . . . It is therefore unnecessary to resort to the hypothesis of pagan influences or of Hellenic or Oriental factors in order to explain the origin of the belief in the supernatural birth of Christ. The tradition consecrated by our Gospels, the myth with which faith in the Divine Sonship of Jesus is poetically invested, has its roots deep down in Israel's religion transformed by the new faith. The dogma of the supernatural birth is the result of the union of traditional interpretation with the Christian principle.[2]

Our observation upon this theory is that it depends too much upon far-fetched invention. Against the hard facts of practical life, it breaks up and is destroyed. For the argument advanced in its support takes no account of the presence of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in Jerusalem while this assumed development of thought in regard to the person of Jesus is going on, nor of the association of the apostles, especially John, with the Jerusalem Church, as directors of the trend of its faith.

In order to enable this theory of Harnack's to stand on its feet, it is necessary to assume that Mary and the apostles were all dead before it was born, which would be contrary to Harnack's own teaching. For it would throw all dates in Luke's Gospel far into the close of the first century. Or else we must say these apostles were absent from the city for long periods and ignorant, therefore, of this new departure. Otherwise we would have to conclude that they were acquiescent in, or indifferent to, this new view of the birth of Jesus which, it is said, had sprung up right among *their own company*. And that, of course, could hardly be.

Did not Mary know the facts? Really the effort is too

[2] *The Virgin Birth*, p. 75.

confusing to think through the logical consequences of such a dream as that of Harnack and Lobstein. If the facts that Mary knew were those afterward narrated by Matthew and Luke, how could the Church in Jerusalem deny them and not stand corrected? If the narratives were not narratives of fact, how did the Church come to have anything to do with them? Under what necessity was it to invent a virgin birth story? Did not the supreme facts of the resurrection of Christ and of the outpouring of the Spirit demonstrate beyond peradventure the divine nature of Christ?

At this point, the time element again becomes a determining factor. For this supposed new departure must have spread with lightning speed, indeed, among the people in the few years between the days of the resurrection and the time when Luke began to gather material for his contemplated Gospel. Notoriously, doctrinal developments, however, do not proceed thus rapidly. Moreover, we must ask in all candor, how could those persons from whom Luke in his investigation obtained his facts have known that there would develop in the immediate future this idea of the Spirit birth to which, in connection with stating their own beliefs, they were to contribute a tale that was in the nature of a legend and not fact? If, on the other hand, Luke's informants did not know, that is, were not endowed with divine foresight to anticipate this development which is alleged to have occurred in later thought concerning when Jesus became the Son of God, were Matthew's informants any better able to foresee it? Did they, too, act on the same principle and, accordingly, tell the same story? Did this development of thought in regard to the date that Jesus became the Son of God begin and run its course independent of the facts concerning his birth which Luke was gathering? Did Luke and Matthew and their informants give currency to this story they tell

and others later on make it fit into this development which was going on independent of them?

If the apparent facts later recorded by the evangelists were not facts at all, it is reasonable to presume that Mary the mother of Jesus would have denied them from the first, had she been then living. And if she was not living, the apostles who were still in Jerusalem—certainly John, in whose home she had resided,[3] or James, "the Lord's brother"—would have refuted these reports of a virgin birth, and the belief in it as a cardinal event in the life of Jesus would not have come down to us. The truth that strikes home at this point is that there was no conceivable *motive* for anyone to invent the story of the virgin birth, nor any excuse, if it were a fiction, for ever allowing a pious fancy of that kind, purely superfluous at the time of its invention, to live on. The presence of the mother of Jesus in the Jerusalem Church would have made the circulation of such a fictitious story of her son's birth wholly impossible. The mother of such a man could not have been ignored in so important a question of fact.

We cannot smoothly glide over the absence of the time element necessary to this "development" of which Harnack speaks. A period of years would have been necessary for religious brooding over the relation of the Spirit to the life of Jesus to spread and any one particular outcome of such brooding and speculation be so generally accepted as to become finally an article of faith in the Jerusalem Church. It would also have taken much time for emphasis on this belief to have become so pronounced and so vital as to cause numbers of the Jewish-Christians in Jerusalem to reject it openly. But the only interval we have at our disposal is that short interval between Pentecost and the rise of the Judaizing party. Evidently this is too short a time for the growth of such an extraordinary belief—a

[3] John xix. 29.

belief not at all necessary to faith in Jesus as the Messiah of God, as the rejection of it by the Judaizing party abundantly proves. For while they denied the virgin birth, they still believed in the Messiahship of Jesus. Even if we extend the time, as it is insisted we must, we are in no better plight, for that brings us right into the years that Luke was gathering his source material, and makes the virgin birth part of "those things (already) most surely believed among us."

We turn now to the assertion that it is to be seriously doubted "whether the idea of the virgin birth would have ever made its appearance on Jewish soil if it had not been for Isaiah vii. 12." Aside from the fact that such an assertion begs the question, for it assumes that the virgin birth did not occur, any application of this prophetic passage to the birth of Jesus is proof at once that the belief itself in the reality of the virgin birth of the Lord had previously arisen. Certainly no account of the details of the birth of Jesus was written before its occurrence. At the time of its occurrence pious Israelites, we may safely say, did not think of connecting it with the prophecy of Isaiah. Nor does the translation of this verse in the Septuagint, in which the Greek word "virgin" is found instead of the Hebrew word for "young woman," alter this conclusion. The facts in regard to that birth were known certainly by the holy women, and the prophecy was employed in their support or it would have been a case of pure invention and the application of the prophecy to a known fiction. But that is unthinkable except under great pressure, and where was the necessity? And what evidence, after all, is there that this passage from Isaiah was ever interpreted by anyone at the time of our Lord as meaning that the Messiah should be born of a virgin? None whatever.

Furthermore, the hypothesis that this quotation from

Isaiah supplied the initial foundation for belief in the virgin birth leaves us wholly in the dark concerning the presence of Joseph in the evangelist's narrative. No father is mentioned in Isaiah vii. 14, nor is the Holy Spirit. Neither does this hypothesis account for the annunciation, nor the contemplated divorce, nor the information given by the Angel to Joseph in a dream, nor for any other of the details of the extraordinary event.

On these terms, it is hard to see how the presence of these other elements in the narratives can be accounted for except on the assumption that the evangelists invented the whole story, although its central figure was their divine Lord, knowing at the time they did so that it had no solid basis in historic fact. What literary artists in that case they must have been! Or if it be said that they did not invent the story, nor did they know it was unhistorical, how they must have been duped! To begin with, there was no need for such a story. What motive is forthcoming to account for it? If belief in a normal birth of Jesus through Spirit influences, as in the case of Samuel or of Samson, had become the fixed faith of the Church, it would have made the task of the evangelists much easier, and certainly would have been more helpful to the spread of the Gospel among the Jews. This account would have seemed a more reasonable one, and, unless Jewish human nature has changed, the rational direction also that the Jewish mind would have taken, except incontrovertible facts to the contrary had stood in the way. Such a belief in a divinely influenced natural birth would have been so in harmony with Jewish thought and Jewish Scriptures that it would not later have become one of the chief factors in fomenting the Ebionite or Unitarian schism. For, as Harnack correctly states—and there are Old Testament passages to prove its truth—"The conviction that our Lord was born of the Spirit did not, according to Jewish

ideas, involve the exclusion of an earthly father any more than an earthly mother."

But, instead, we are asked to believe that a course was taken which was contrary to what was natural to the Jewish mind, for which no real motive or necessity in the situation is assigned, and the miraculous birth of Jesus affirmed even from the very beginning of the primitive Church in Jerusalem. Do men go out of their way and counter to the natural bent of their minds and their established religious beliefs to invent a story full of details—dates, names and events to match—for which there was no need and which therefore could have served no purpose whatever in which they were interested at the time it was invented!

It is asserted by some who deny the supernatural birth —and the assertion is commonly accredited in certain circles—that the reason why Isaiah vii. 14 was first wrongly interpreted by the primitive Church and then misapplied to Jesus, is that "popular imagination" or pious fancy conjectured that He must of necessity have been born in a supernatural manner. This opinion has the support of some eminent scholars. Others equally eminent, however, dissent from such a view. The points urged are these:

(1) That Isaiah did not speak of a *virgin* at all. The Hebrew word that he would have used had he prophesied of a virgin is *be' thulah,* whereas he employed the word *"almah,"* which does not signify "virgin" but "young woman."

(2) That he was not referring to a Messiah seven hundred and fifty years in the future, for this would have been no consolation to King Ahaz in the struggle which he was then waging with the kings of Israel and Syria.

(3) That Isaiah did not refer to a Messiah at all, but in order to give a sign of assurance to Ahaz that his conflict with the kings would terminate happily, he simply

declared that before a child—any child born the day he was speaking—was fully weaned, the fortunes of the king would be changed for the better.

It will be observed that the supposition upon which these several exegetical statements are all built goes unchallenged, that the prophet Isaiah did really give a sign to the king, notwithstanding the refusal of Ahaz to ask for a sign, and that this prophecy of a child to be born seven centuries later was that sign. Now, it must be admitted that this would be a sign of no emergency value to Ahaz. But that is the prime question. Did Isaiah give any sign, any prophecy whatever to King Ahaz? There does not appear to be sufficient warrant for the contention that he did. Ahaz refused point blank to ask for any sign from the Lord, and in consequence of his blunt refusal the prophet did not force one upon him. Once he had made the offer in such solemn and all-comprehensive terms, and it had been rejected, he turned abruptly from the skeptical king and addressed his prophesy to the whole nation:

> Moreover the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord. And he [Isaiah] said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsoken of both her kings.[4]

[4] Is. vii. 10-16.

Various explanations intended to show that Isaiah referred to some child in the immediate future have been advanced. But none of these explanations explains. Peake[5] thinks that Isaiah predicts that some young woman shall bring forth a son and, in token of her faith, shall call his name Immanuel. But that supposition does not yield much satisfaction. How could such a commonplace event be a sign to Ahaz? In order to find out if the child so predicted was ever born—for before this child shall know the difference between good and evil the land Ahaz abhorred shall be forsaken of its kings—and that he was really named Immanuel by his mother, Ahaz would have had to keep a register of every birth in his kingdom. Others think the prediction of Isaiah pointed to the birth of Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, and that the young woman referred to was the king's wife. But if II Kings xviii. 2 is to be depended upon, Hezekiah was twenty-five years of age when he came to the throne, and therefore he was living at the time the prophecy was uttered, which was about 734 B. C. Critics belonging to the school of Kuenen and Robertson Smith are of the opinion that *almah* may refer to any young woman, and then it would be no sign at all, for scores of Immanuels could be found scattered through the land, since every new-born child might be called Immanuel if its mother chose.

If the statement of Zahn[6] is correct, as seems to be the case, viz., that the Jews of the generation preceding the time of Christ did not regard this verse of Isaiah as Messianic, it is nevertheless true that, when knowledge of the virgin birth did become public, Jewish-Christians at once turned, as did Matthew in his Gospel, to this prophecy of Isaiah and applied it to the event. They connected the two and saw in the one the fulfillment or verification of

[5] In Hastings' *Dictionary*, "*Christ and the Gospels*," I, 783.
[6] Commentary on Matthew.

the other. The prophecy did not create the belief in the virgin birth, but public knowledge of the virgin birth did soon suggest an interpretation and application of that verse in Isaiah more in harmony with Messianic predictions of ancient times than were the rabbinic interpretations of that same verse in Christ's time. Oehler notes the parallel between the passage Micah v. 3 and the prophecy of Isaiah vii. 14 as to the birth of Immanuel from the young wife or virgin (*almah*), a passage whose reference to the Messiah is rendered unmistakable by its connection with ix. 5, though the prevailing interpretation at present regards it as only typically Messianic. "*Almah* indeed is not *be' thulah*, as if the birth of Messiah from the *virgo illibrata* were here taught. Besides, the essential feature of the given sign is not the fact that an *almah* conceives but that the *Messiah is Immanuel.*"[7] Driver,[8] Briggs, Cheyne, Ewald, Hengstenburg, Delitzsch and many other scholars interpret Isaiah vii. 14 just as did the Jewish Christian in Jerusalem. Our conclusion is that this verse in Isaiah could not have been the source of the virgin birth, but once the birth of Jesus from a virgin came to public knowledge, Christians soon connected it with this verse in Isaiah and regarded it as a fulfillment.

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[7] *Old Testament Theology*, Sec. 231.
[8] Commentary on Isaiah, p. 42.

CHAPTER IV

Interpolation

The third objection to the acceptance of the virgin birth which we have to consider is that the narratives concerning it are *interpolations* subsequently inserted in the original text. Thus Usener in the *Encyclopedia Biblica* insists that "the two verses in Luke i. 34, 35, the only verses in Luke in which the supernatural birth of Jesus is stated, are incompatible with the rest of Luke i. 2, and this must have been interpolated. With these two removed, what remains is a purely Jewish-Christian account of the birth of the Messiah, still resting upon the foundation of the old and genuine tradition that Jesus was the offspring—the first-born offspring—of the marriage of Joseph and Mary."

What remains, however, is far from a self-consistent account of a natural birth. Many other statements occur in the early chapters of Matthew and Luke which relate to the miraculous birth and lose all meaning whatever if the story of the supernatural birth is omitted. In direct opposition to this suggestion of Usener, which is by no means new, Dr. James Moffatt in his *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament* says that while omissions in Luke i. 34, 35, are possible, in Matthew, on the other hand, "no hypothesis of literary criticism or textual emendation can disentangle the conception of a virgin birth from a story which is wrought together and woven on one loom."[1]

Two questions call for settlement here: (1) If these

[1] Pp. 250, 251. "Neither the style nor the contents of i.-ii. [Matthew's Gospel] affords valid evidence for suspecting that they are a later insertion in the Gospel."

narratives are interpolations, were they the work of Jewish-Christians or Gentile-Christians? And (2) when were these interpolations inserted?

That the birth story in Matthew is not an interpolation made by *Jewish-Christians* is plain from the fact that the Ebionites rejected that whole Gospel on the ground that the story of the virgin birth was part and parcel of it and discredited it. Nor will it do to say that it was an interpolation in Luke made by Gentile-Christians, for then we would have no way left to account for the immediate rejection of the Gospel of Matthew on its appearance by the Ebionites, if that earliest draft of this Gospel did not contain the birth story. Surely the Ebionites would not have felt called upon to reject Matthew's Gospel although it did not contain the birth story, which they did not believe, simply because Luke's Gospel gave asylum to it.

Then, again, when could this alleged interpolation have been inserted? Was it made in Luke's Gospel, with which we are now concerned, while he was living or after his death? We do not know what year Luke died, but we do know that he lived, at any rate, to complete his historical work, the Book of Acts. We know that his Gospel was written before he wrote the Acts of the Apostles, that is, before 70 A. D. It is, therefore, quite probable that had his Gospel been tampered with, Luke lived long enough to have it brought to his attention.

Is it likely, in that event, that in writing his Book of Acts Luke would have made no reference to the false additions that meddlesome third parties were making to his former work? In his address to Theophilus he makes mention of his Gospel. A copy of that manuscript, indeed, he sent immediately to Theophilus. Suppose, now, that this copy sent to Theophilus did not contain the narrative of the virgin birth. That makes a possible date for the interpolation relatively late and throws us back on the

question, *How can we account for the belief of the primitive Church in the virgin birth.* That such a belief was current long before the Gospel was written has already been clearly shown, and it continued a common belief later. Now, it is historically true, as Harnack states, that every such belief "must be traced back to the Churches of Palestine, and must be ascribed to the first decades after the resurrection." But it is not possible to trace this belief back to the primitive Church if it originated in an interpolation in Luke's Gospel with which Luke himself was unacquainted at the time he wrote his Book of Acts.

We must ask those who still insist that this belief did not exist in the primitive Church, and was unknown to the New Testament writers, to set a time and circle for its first appearance. This is the rock upon which the case of the deniers of the virgin birth goes to pieces. If they fix the date later than 70 A. D., difficulty at once arises from the fact that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke were already in circulation. Any attempt, therefore, at an interpolation of such a character in both Gospels would have been utterly useless, for it could not have been done without the whole Church becoming aware of the fact. The Church was quick to discover and denounce the mutilations by Marcion in Luke's Gospel and the Pauline Epistles. How could these interpolations under discussion here have escaped detection and similar exposure?

Now, in answer to the first question, and in order that every possible theory may have a hearing, let it be supposed that the source of the information that Jesus was born of a virgin was the group of Jewish-Christians who fled from Jerusalem at the approach of the Roman armies, 69 A. D., and returned under Hadrian about 117 A. D.[2] Some scholars are of the opinion that these Christians

[2] For an interesting account of this event and statements of early authorities relative to the subject in the text, see Harnack's *Expansions of Christianity*, Vol. II, pp. 247-271.

preserved among themselves the genuine teachings of Jesus free of all adulteration by what is erroneously termed the Christianized Rabbinism of Paul. Renan states that "The collection of the Logia or discourses of Jesus was made in the Ebionite medium of the Bactanea," and quotes Epiphanius, *Against Heresies,* as his authority, an opinion, however, which cannot be accepted, because of the early date which criticism has now firmly established for the writing of the Gospels. But the claim that belief in the virgin birth originated among these Jewish-Christians cannot be accepted, for the reason that long before the year 117 A. D. it was held and taught by widely scattered Gentile-Christians far remote from the Bactanea.

In order to understand the significance of this historical fact and appreciate fully all that is involved in it, we are here again led back to the apostolic Church in Jerusalem as the source of this belief in the miraculous birth, and to its first persecution and dispersion as recorded in Acts viii. 1-5; xi. 19, 20.

> At that time there was a great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the Apostles. . . . Then Philip went down to Samaria and preached Christ unto them. . . . Now they that were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen, traveled as far as Phenice and Cyprus and Antioch preaching the Word to none but unto the Jews only. . . . And some of these were of Cyprus and Cyrene which when they were come to Antioch spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

What was the date of this persecution? Few commentators agree exactly on dates. Kuienen, Olshausen, Ewald and others fix upon 33 A. D. More recent scholars,

such as Harnack, Ramsay and Bacon, differ by some few years. Sometime before 40 A. D., perhaps as early as 33 A. D., the disciples were driven out of Jerusalem and scattered abroad. In 110 A. D., however, or a little later, Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, while on his way to martyrdom in Rome, declared to all the Churches as he passed on has journey, that the mystery of the virgin birth was preached, with the mystery of the death of our Lord, as an article of Christian belief. To the Church at Ephesus he writes, "Now the virginity of Mary hidden from the prince of this world as was also her offspring, and the death of the Lord, these mysteries of renown which were wrought in silence by God."[3]

To the Trallians he writes, "Stop your ears, therefore, when anyone speaks to you at variance with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was descended from David, and was also of Mary; who was begotten of God and of the virgin but not after the same manner."[4]

To the Church at Smyrna he writes that they are "fully persuaded with respect to our Lord Jesus Christ, that he was truly of the seed of David, according to the flesh, and the Son of God according to the will and power of God; that he was truly born of a virgin."

This holy man was Bishop of Antioch, where the disciples were first called Christians. That city was the missionary headquarters of Paul, Silas, Barnabas, Luke and other leaders of the primitive Church. Between the Church at Antioch and the Church at Jerusalem there was constant communication during the period covered by the Book of Acts.

Now, who will say that Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, did not have opportunity to learn what had been the belief of the Church of Antioch from its founding?

[3] Ephes. xix.
[4] Ep. to the Trall. ix.

Had the belief in the virgin birth sprung up during his presidency of the Antioch Church, he would have branded it as a spurious belief not contained in the teachings delivered by the Fathers of the Church, and therefore it could not have been incorporated in the creed of the Church along with the "mystery" of the death of our Lord.

Then, again, was the year 110 A. D. so far removed from apostolic days that an aged man like Ignatius in his youth could not have seen and heard the great leaders of the Antiochian Church? Forty years only had passed since the destruction of Jerusalem. Paul had died only a few years before that event. Could not Ignatius have known Luke and Barnabas in his boyhood? This line of reasoning makes it evident that in the Church at Antioch belief in the virgin birth must have extended back to the very days of the apostles and the events recorded in the Book of Acts. And where did Antioch get this belief except from the teachings of those members of the Church of Jerusalem in Pentecostal days who fled at the dispersion to Antioch, as well as everywhere else, preaching the Word? Knowledge of the virgin birth was public property not only to the Church in Antioch, but also in the Gentile Churches at Ephesus, at Tralles and at Smyrna, before the Jewish-Christians separated from their fellow Christians at the second destruction of Jerusalem, under Hadrian. It could not, therefore, have originated among Christian exiles during their sojourn in the Bactanea.

Other evidence is not wanting to the same effect. According to Acts viii. 1, some of the disciples who were scattered abroad during the persecution went into Samaria: "Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ unto them." He went from the Church at Jerusalem, it will be noted, in those marvelous days when the Spirit was mighty in the Church and while the apostles, and Mary the mother of Jesus, were still numbered in its

membership. Now, it is significant in this connection that Justin Martyr, one of the earliest defenders of the belief in virgin birth against the Ebionites, came from Samaria. This philosopher was born at Flavia Neopolis, a city of Samaria, about 114 A. D. After his conversion he traveled extensively. He visited Ephesus and Rome, where he finally settled and was martyred, probably 165 A. D.

It is fair to assume that he knew the faith of the Churches where he sojourned, especially at Ephesus and Rome. He knew the faith of the Christians in his native Samaria, and the Gospel that had been preached to them. But the belief of these Churches also must have extended in an unbroken line to the days of the apostles. Nor had so long a period of time intervened that the original teachings could have been forgotten. It is clear from Justin's writings that in all the Churches he visited he found the same essentials of belief, and that the virgin birth which he defended against the attacks of Trypho, the Jew, was included in that common faith. In his *Dialogue with Trypho* he says, referring to the Ebionites, " 'For there are some, my friends,' I said, 'of our race who admit that He is the Christ, while holding Him to be a man of men; with whom I do not agree, nor would I, even [if] most of those who have [now] the same opinion as myself should say so since we were enjoined by Christ Himself to put not faith in human doctrines, but in those proclaimed by the blessed Prophets and taught by Himself.' "[5]

In his *First Apology,* also, Justin sets forth the faith of the Church.

> It was this [that is, the Word of God] which, when it came upon the virgin and overshadowed her, caused her to conceive, not by intercourse, but by power. . . . For things which were incredible and

[5] Chap. XLVIII.

> seemed impossible with men, those God predicted by the Spirit of Prophecy as about to come to pass, in order that, when they were come to pass, there might be no unbelief, but faith because of their prediction. But lest some, not understanding the Prophecy now cited, should charge us with the very things we have been laying to the charge of the poets who say that Jupiter went into women through lust, let us try to explain the words. This, then, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive," signifies that a virgin should conceive without intercourse. For if she had intercourse with any one whatever she was no longer a virgin; but the power of God having come upon the virgin, overshadowed her, and caused her while yet a virgin to conceive.[6]

This is the faith of a representative Christian of his day. He was writing in defense of fellow Christians and died a martyr to the faith. He grew up in Samaria. He dwelt for some time in Ephesus. Did he not learn during his sojourn with them the faith of that Church in Ephesus in which were teachers who but yesterday had listened to the apostle John? He lived in Rome for a season also and doubtless became acquainted with the leaders of that Church. It is generally held that Clement, the friend and co-worker of St. Paul, who wrote his Epistle to the Corinthian Church about 97 A. D. was for some time the chief pastor of the Church at Rome. Did Justin, then, not learn the faith of this Church, and did not this faith rest upon the word of living witnesses separated by only a few years from Paul's day?

Let us turn back a moment to the Asiatic Churches. Ignatius on his way to Rome 110 A. D. visited the Church at Smyrna. Here he wrote those Epistles to the Ephesians

[6] Semisch, *Justin Martyr*, Chap. XLIII.

and to the Trallians in which he referred to the virgin birth. Polycarp was Bishop of the Church in Smyrna at this time, and according to Irenaeus, who was his disciple, "Polycarp was instructed by the apostles themselves and was brought in contact with many who had seen Christ."[7] Now, it is obvious that Polycarp knew the belief of the Church over which he had episcopal supervision. Nor will it be questioned that these two Bishops of the Church each knew what the other believed and the particulars of the faith of their respective Churches, as well as the other Churches in Asia.

Yet these authentic Epistles of Ignatius make it clear that the virgin birth was well known in the Churches at Smyrna, Ephesus, Troas, Tralles, Antioch and other centers some years before the date set for its origin among an exiled group of Jewish-Christians in Bactanea, at the close of the first century or the beginning of the second. This fact compels us to repeat the question, Whence, then, did these Churches acquire this belief? Our answer is, the Antioch Christians received it from members of the Church at Jerusalem, where Mary the mother of Jesus lived and where the "brethren of the Lord" and the apostles lived and labored long before any written Gospel existed in which interpolations could be inserted. From Jerusalem the belief spread to Samaria, to Antioch and to other Gentile Churches. Later on, it helped to create a line of cleavage in the primitive Church in Jerusalem. This division finally culminated during the reign of Emperor Hadrian, on the one hand, in Ebionism, and, on the other, in a union of the Jewish-Christians (who accepted the virgin birth) with the Gentile-Christians in one Church in Jerusalem. Marcus was the first Bishop of the united Church.

Such, then, are the principal objections raised against the position here presented that belief in the virgin birth

[7] Eusebius, *History*, IV. 14.

originated in the primitive Church, and the answers to the same.

The foregoing discussion seems to furnish solid ground for the judgment that this so-called proof that the virgin birth was not an article of the faith of the primitive Christian Church at Jerusalem and elsewhere from the silence of St. Paul and other New Testament writers concerning it is in need of much stronger arguments than those relied upon, for it is undeniable that the more closely the particulars of this proof are examined the less impressive they become.

CHAPTER V

Paul and the Primitive Church

Now that the objections have been answered that would prevent us from asserting that knowledge of the virgin birth was public property in the primitive Church, and, also, as it has been clearly shown by several lines of inquiry that it was an article of its faith, we shall take up the second question which has indeed been the underlying motive of the investigation conducted thus far.

II. *Did Paul know the belief of the Church in Jerusalem?*

Several facts at once present themselves for consideration.

(1) That news of the preaching to which the apostles set themselves soon after the crucifixion was soon known throughout Jerusalem, that it occasioned widespread excitement and that the majority of the population would probably have been converted, following the example of hundreds of the priests of the temple, had not the authorities employed the most repressive measures against it, is the impression that the early chapters of the Book of the Acts[1] undoubtedly convey. Paul, then known as Saul, was in Jerusalem. He was well known to the authorities and was an acknowledged leader in the persecution of the Church.[2] He was present at the mock trial of Stephen.[3] He heard Stephen's defense of his faith, and therefore he must have been familiar during all the period that followed with the chief tenets of the new faith. After his conver-

[1] i.-viii.

[2] *Ibid.*, vii. 54; viii. 1-3.

[3] Some scholars endeavor to prove that Paul did not participate in the persecution against Stephen. See Havet, *Le Christianisme et ses Origines*, Vol. IV, p. 91. On the other side see Brandt, *Die Evanghelische Geschicte und der Ursprung des Christentums*, p. 516.

sion Paul returned to Jerusalem and "assayed to join himself to the disciples, but they were afraid of him and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus; and he was with them coming in and going out of Jerusalem."[4] Here is our first piece of direct evidence that Paul was acquainted with the beliefs of the Church at Jerusalem.

(2) A year or so after the Church had been organized at Antioch,[5] Paul again came to Jerusalem with Barnabas, bringing contributions to the Church there.[6] During this stay of Paul in the city, Peter was thrown into prison, preliminary to his execution when the Passover was ended. It is interesting to speculate on the whereabouts of Paul on the night that Peter was rescued from prison. Mary, the mother of John Mark, who was the companion of Paul, had, as we know from Acts xii. 12, a home in Jerusalem. That home, it is evident, was the meeting-place of the disciples and the headquarters, probably, of the apostles and of the Church. John also had a home in the city, as well as Paul's sister.[7] Peter seems to have known very well where to seek the brethren when in the dead of the night he finds himself unexpectedly released from prison. "And when he had considered the thing he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying."[8]

Who could the "many" have been but members of the Jerusalem Church, that is, the disciples? Now, it is not improbable that Paul and Barnabas would be spending

[4] Acts ix. 26-28.
[5] *Ibid.*, x. 19.
[6] See Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, Vol. III, p. 458.
[7] Acts xiii. 16.
[8] *Ibid.*, xii. 12.

most of their time in the company of the Church to which they had recently come with financial assistance, and that they were among the "many" present that night at Mary's home. Paul may have been at his sister's home that particular evening, but it seems more probable that he was also with the "many" at Mary's house, for we read at the close of the chapter that "Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry and took with them John, whose surname was Mark." Apparently they left Jerusalem suddenly, to escape the vengeance which Herod might exact for the escape of Peter, and took with them Mark the son of Mary at whose house they had stayed.

(3) In chapter xv. Paul is again back in Jerusalem. There had been great debates disturbing the Church at Antioch, occasioned by certain Jewish Christians from Judea who taught Gentile converts the necessity of circumcision according to the Law of Moses, along with the belief in Jesus as the Messiah. But Paul had preached that both the Law and the Prophets, the whole revelation of God, indeed, was summed up in Jesus. Jesus, not Moses nor the Law nor the Prophets, was the Savior of men. There arose, as might be expected, no small dissension and disputation in the Church, which was allayed finally by sending a deputation to the Mother Church at Jerusalem to ask it to act as arbitrator of these differences.

The deputation appointed, consisting of Paul and Barnabas and certain other members of the Church, went up to Jerusalem. An assembly of the whole Church, including the apostles and elders, was called to consider and act on what was really the greatest and farthest-reaching issue that the Church had yet encountered: whether the Christian faith should be content to remain a Jewish sect or set out to become a universal religion. The apostles were present in a body. These men certainly

knew all there was to be known of the Church they had founded. They must have possessed a version of their own of the facts connected with the birth of Jesus. His mother was a member of that Church. James, the President of the Council, a "brother of the Lord," and Jude, also a "brother," must have had some testimony to give concerning them. John, in whose home Mary lived with his mother Salome, also would have some contribution to make, and doubtless some among the holy women who were friends of Mary had some understanding of her secret. It is not possible to believe that all these apostles and elders who had such an interest in, and means of access to, an intimate knowledge of everything that had to do with our Lord's life from the beginning had never heard of any remarkable circumstances connected with his birth.

Cogent proof that they did know of them lies in the fact that, in the Gospel of Luke which contains the narrative of his birth from a virgin and which was written before the Book of Acts, Luke declares his intention "to set forth in order those things which are surely believed among us even as they delivered them to us which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word." He tells Theophilus that he had taken pains to arrive at a perfect understanding (had *accurately traced out step by step*) all things from the very beginning, in order that "thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed." When and where had the process gone on of establishing "those things surely believed among us"? At once this question carries us back to the earliest beginnings of the Church, and "those who delivered them to us" were certainly the very ones who were then present at this Council.

Now, it is quite true that the all-engrossing, the most momentous question before the Council was, Christ or Moses, Law or Grace. This controversy which had agi-

tated the Church from its earliest days was destined a few years later to divide the Church forever, on its return from Pella to Jerusalem. But are we to assume that Paul in all his conversations with the apostles and elders and members of the Church at these meetings never learned anything about the birth, birthplace, childhood, youth, sayings or deeds of Jesus? Did he never discuss any subject with them other than circumcision and the Law?

(4) Paul visited Jerusalem for the last time[9] about 56 A. D. "And when we were come to Jerusalem the breathren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James, and all the elders were present." Here, again, the same old ever-recurring difference between Paul and the Judaizing element in the Church presented itself and doubtless was the main question under discussion. But must we assume here also that other matters of faith and Christian history were never mentioned to Paul by those apostles who had talked with the Lord and also knew Mary, the mother of Jesus?

Some scholars insist, it is quite true, that Paul knew little or nothing of our Lord's earthly life,[10] and in proof cite the fact that in his Epistles Paul makes few references to any saying or event in the life of Jesus. Such a contention, however, in the light of the above facts, cannot be allowed any serious weight. Paul was not following a dream. He was not always absorbed in theology, nor was his thought-life filled with metaphysical abstractions. Paul knew vastly more than his Epistles indicate, every-

[9] *Ibid.*, xxi.

[10] Renan, *Les Apostes*, p. 14; *Saint Paul*, p. 563; Julicher, *Einleitung*, p. 24. But Kein, in *History of Jesus of Nazareth*, Eng. Trans., affirms the opposite, as do Holtzman, *Leben Jesu*, pp. 6-9, and Lloyd, *The Historic Christ in the Letters of St. Paul*, Biblica Sacra.

Feinne, however, decides in the negative! "Dass der Apostal der irdischen Jesus gekannt und durch, ihn schon einen Eindruck erhalten habe, muss als unwahrscheinlich gelten, da er sich nie, auch 11kor. 5, 16 nicht, daruf beruft, in Gegenteil, fast geflissentlich I Kor. i. 9; Gal. i. 12-16, augh I Kor. xv. 8, sein Christusbild und sein Apostalat auf die Wirkung des auferstandenen und erhohten Christus zuruckfuhrt" (*Jesus Christus und Paulus*, p. 93).

thing, indeed, about the historical Jesus that was common property. It must not be forgotten that Luke was Paul's traveling companion and that Luke always had with him, and was adding to, the documents which furnished the material for his Gospel. The apostle himself tells us that three years after his conversation he went up to Jerusalem to visit (in the Greek, to interrogate about facts, to question) Peter and abode with him fifteen days. It is not too much to suppose that during this time Paul learned much from the chief of the apostles concerning the life of the Lord Jesus. In the First Epistle to the Corinthians he writes, "I delivered unto you that which I received," and immediately proceeds to give the most complete list of the reappearances of the risen Lord in Scripture. Where else did he get this information?[11]

Paul was a student in residence in Jerusalem. He took the lead in the persecution of the Christian community there. He returned to the Jerusalem Church several times on important missions in company with those of high repute belonging to it, visiting apostles and Elders, and also Peter, and preaching in its synagogues. Is the assertion credible that the apostle of Jesus Christ, who had seen the heavenly Jesus on the Damascus road, never once improved these opportunities to inquire about the earthly life of that same Jesus? Would he not learn all the facts in the life of the Lord which everyone else knew, and others, perhaps, which were not so well known by the majority of the Church? We must agree with Weizsacker that Paul undoubtedly had acquired a knowledge of the evangelical tradition of Jesus.

The right has now been earned to say that knowledge

[11] Paul does know that our Lord had brothers, I Cor. ix. 5; Gal. i. 19; ii. 9-12. He knows that He was born under the Mosaic Law, Gal. iv. 4; that his earthly ministry was limited to the House of Israel, Rom. xv. 8; that He was obedient even unto death on the cross, Phil. ii. 8; that He had chosen apostles, Gal. i. 17-19; I Cor. ix. 5, 15, 19. Paul's knowledge of our Lord's earthly life seems to have been very full and comprehensive. But see Feinne, *Jesus Christus und Paulus.*

of the birth of Jesus from a virgin was public property at that time in the Jerusalem Church. It is unreasonable to suppose that Paul, the great preacher and interpreter of the Spiritual Christ, did not know all that was known to John, in whose home Mary the mother of Jesus lived, or to all the other apostles, about the biography of Jesus. Sufficient data has now been produced to warrant this conclusion, also, that whatever was known in the primitive Church at Jerusalem concerning the birth and life of Jesus was also familiar to Paul.

But if further evidence were to be demanded, we need only to call upon the companions of St. Paul—Barnabas, Luke, John Mark, Sylvanus or Silas—who were all well acquainted with the Church in Jerusalem. Barnabas was one of its foremost leaders, next in importance to the apostles. Mark, at whose mother's house the apostles and the Church often met, would surely be a competent witness concerning what was believed by all who assembled there. Although Luke was a member of the Church at Antioch, he, too, knew everybody of note in the Jerusalem Church. It appeals to reason that anything which Paul did not otherwise learn, those companions of his knew and would inform him. But let the following particulars in support of this conclusion be carefully considered.

From the Epistle to the Colossians iv. 10-14, and also from the Epistle to Philemon, we learn that Mark and Luke were together with Paul in Rome. He is a prisoner, they are ministering to him in his bonds. Think of all that would come out in long conversations held by these three together, Paul, Mark and Luke! According to the best authorities this was either in the year 62 or a little later. Now, it is difficult to believe that these conversations between these three great personalities never dwelt upon Christ Jesus and the facts of his life—his parentage, birth and ministry. Mark and Luke had already written

their Gospels. Mark wrote his first and then Luke had made use of it. *"There is no doubt,"* says Harnack, *"that St. Mark's Gospel belongs to the sources of the Gospel of Luke. . . . If two years after the arrival of St. Paul in Rome the Acts was already written, then, the date of the Lukan Gospel must be earlier, and that of the Gospel of Mark earlier still.*[12] Nearly all New Testament scholars of recent times agree that the Gospel of Mark was one of the sources of the Gospel of Luke.

Here, then, these two evangelists have Paul's company all to themselves. As between an author and his book, who would hesitate in making his choice of the better source of information? What world of misunderstanding would be removed if there were only some way that these three could check up for us the chronological data, etc., in which rationalizing critics of recent times have indulged in their commentaries on the Gospels of Mark and Luke!

But we may be certain that Luke inquired and Mark explained why he had omitted all mention of the birth of Jesus from a virgin from his Gospel. Mark, it is absolutely certain, did not do so from lack of information, since he had lived and mingled in the identical circle in the Jerusalem Church where Luke obtained his data. But the point to be distinctly noted is that Paul would improve this golden opportunity to learn from these two evangelists and satisfy his mind in regard to any points on which he felt the need of more light. Moreover, Paul was probably already acquainted with Luke's Gospel, for Luke did not collect his materials in Rome, nor write his Gospel there, but did it probably in time spent with Paul occasionally for two years at Caesarea.

Of course, all this use of Scripture and method of inference may sound unconvincing to those to whom it is strange and novel to have such reproductions of scenes

[12] *Date of the Acts*, etc., p. 125.

from those early days set before them. But that will pass away once they begin to form this habit of collecting scattered facts of the New Testament and relating them in time and place to each other. Cumulative bits of evidence are stubborn things. They can not safely be brushed aside.

It will not, therefore, help matters for a narrow critic, deficient in historical imagination, to refuse to examine any and all conclusions based upon what in the very nature of things must have occurred at this meeting of Paul and Luke and Mark in Rome. Unless these three ministers of the crucified Jesus had for some unknown reason become absolutely indifferent to the very cause which had brought them to Rome, no matter what other subjects might be taken up, the bulk of their conversation would be about the history, the present conditions and future prospects of Christianity.

Harnack is no dreamer. This eminent scholar says:

> It is impossible that St. Mark brought his Gospel to Rome when he came thither to St. Paul in prison; he may while in Rome have subjected it to further revision and some considerable time later may have published it at the prayer of the Roman Christians. . . . If we compare this conclusion from the evidence of tradition with the date presupposed by the chronology of the Lukan writings, we find that they are contradictory. Tradition asserts no veto against the hypothesis that St. Luke, when he met St. Mark in the company of St. Paul the prisoner, was permitted by him to peruse a written record of the Gospel history which was essentially identical with the Gospel of St. Mark given to the Church at a later date.[18]

[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 132, 133.

> Zahn[14] also states: "Since Luke was familiar with a number of *attempts to write the history of Christianity,* and since his characterization of these efforts perfectly suits Mark's Gospel . . . it is natural to suppose that he used this writing. He was acquainted with Mark and knew his relation to Peter who was a prominent eye-witness of the Gospel events. He was in Rome in company with Mark about the year 62 (Col. iv. 14) and possibly again in 66 (II Tim. iv. 11), consequently at the time Mark wrote his Gospel."

What other conclusion, then, can be drawn from this testimony of experts with all the previous labors of critical scholarship before them than that, whatever was known to the writers of the Gospel concerning the birth of our Lord, Paul the apostle knew. Of them it can be said that they did know that Jesus was born of a virgin, and that they recorded the facts connected therewith; they did know that this fact was included by the Church among the facts *"believed among us,"* as Luke states it. Whatever may have been the reasons for his silence concerning it, Paul, therefore, also knew this to be the case.

In this connection perhaps it may not be amiss to remember that while the Scriptures were read in Hebrew in the synagogues of Palestine, the Greek Version (the Septuagint lxx) was the Bible of the primitive Church, and also of the Jews scattered throughout the empire. With this Greek Bible in their hands both Jews and Greeks likewise could test the references of the apostles in their preaching concerning Christ as the Messiah of prophecy and note the agreement between Prophecy and its fulfillment, as did the Bereans,[15] who scrutinized "the Scriptures

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[14] *Introduction to the New Testament,* Vol. III, pp. 101, 102.
[15] Acts xvii. 11.

daily to see whether these things were so." "This Version," says Dalman,[16] "was the most important book read by the Christians in public and in private." It was the only Bible the Gentile or Greek-speaking Christians had, or understood. It was the only Scripture read and taught in the Churches.

This was Paul's Bible. In his writings, as also in his preaching, he employed the Greek Scriptures, which he quotes in his Epistles no less than 136 times. But in this Version the prophecy of Isaiah[17] concerning the wonderful child who should be called Immanuel, and which reads, "Behold a young woman [*almah*, a young woman of marriageable age] shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel," is translated, "Behold a virgin [*parthenos*] shall conceive and bear a son, and thou shalt call his name Emmanuel."

The apostle, who was certainly as well versed in Hebrew as he was in Greek, must have been satisfied that the translators of the Septuagint, which was in use some two hundred and fifty years before Christ, had made no mistake when they rendered the word *almah*, "a young woman," by the Greek term, *parthenos*, "a virgin," instead of by *neanis*, which also signifies "a young woman." With the same Greek Scriptures before them, the distinctive use of *parthenos*, rather than *neanis*, would not escape the notice of Christians including his own converts in all the Churches. This rendering of the Hebrew *almah* by *parthenos* instead of *neanis*, which is more poetical, was adopted by the Jewish translators (250 B. C.) and was accepted by the Jews throughout the Dispersion.

It is generally understood that Isaiah vii. 14 was not interpreted by teachers of Israel in Christ's time as Messianic, but those who had listened to the preaching of the

[16] *Words of Jesus*, p. 18.
[17] Is. vii. 14.

apostles and the thousands who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah were sure this was an error. Matthew i. 22 gives us an insight into the interpretation adopted by the Christians which was directly opposed to the interpretation of the Scribes: "Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 'Behold a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel.'" The preachers of the Gospel rejected the teaching of the Rabbis wherever it conflicted with their own interpretation of the Scripture in the light of the facts in the life of Christ.

The resurrection formed the dividing line between the Jewish interpretation of Scripture and the Christian. Jesus himself had set the example of independence by his nonconformity with tradition and by his many corrections of rabbinic error in Scriptural interpretation. Ignoring the endless discussions of the schools concerning the Messiah, and of those leaders who saw everything in the Scriptures but the Day of God, "Christ Jesus," writes Luke in his Gospel (xxiv. 27), "beginning at Moses and the Prophets expounded unto them (Cleopas and his companion) in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."

Peter on the Day of Pentecost, and again on the occasion of the healing at the Gate Beautiful, openly declared that the teaching of the schools, with which the common understanding of the people concerning the Messiah coincided, was entirely erroneous, because the schools had misinterpreted the references and so had failed to understand the true character of the Messiah.[18]

Likewise, Philip the evangelist interpreted the Prophecy of Isaiah for the Eunuch in a way quite opposed to the non-Messianic understanding of it by the Rabbis, for he

[18] Acts iii. 14-17.

applied the Prophecy to Jesus.[19] The dividing line between the old and the new form of interpretation for St. Paul was his experience on the Damascus road. That vision of the risen Christ compelled changes in his interpretation of Prophecy to bring it into harmony with its newly discovered fulfillment in Jesus, "and straightway he preached Christ in the Synagogues, that He is the Son of God." His defense before Agrippa[20] confirms the fact that he had abandoned the rabbinic interpretation concerning the Messiah and now interpreted the Scriptures in the light of his vision of the risen Lord.

Paul's conviction that the teachers of Israel had gone astray in their interpretation and understanding of Scripture is thus set forth in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians:[21] "But their minds were blinded for until this day remained the same vail untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament, which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day when Moses is read the vail is upon their heart."

The upshot of the whole matter with reference to Christ is that the Jews interpreted and applied prophecy in one way, the Christians in another. The Christians interpreted the verse in regard to the virgin in Isaiah as Messianic in significance and saw its fulfillment in the birth of Jesus, as did the evangelist Matthew in his Gospel. Paul also must have known that according to Scripture the Messiah must be born of a virgin and that his birthplace, according to Micah v. 2, 3, must be Bethlehem. The one prophecy was as clear as the other.

To affirm, then, that Paul knew not that birth from a virgin was prophesied of the Messiah is equivalent to saying that he had not read Isaiah or that he had not applied the Prophecy therein the same as had the Christians, and

[19] *Ibid.*, viii. 26-35.
[20] *Ibid.*, xxvi. 20-23.
[21] iii. 14, 15.

as Matthew in his Gospel had interpreted it, or that he did not know the true origin of Jesus whom he had preached as Messiah, "the Son of God." If Isaiah did prophesy of a virgin birth as his origin and Jesus was not born of a virgin according to the facts of history, then what becomes of the claim that Jesus was the Messiah? This would put us in the same kind of difficulty as would a statement that Jesus was not born in Bethlehem as required by the Prophecy of Micah: "But thou Bethlehem Ephrata, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to rule in Israel: whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Furthermore, if we may be pardoned for departing for the moment from our purpose to treat the subject historically should we attempt to discuss it doctrinally, it would be very difficult, on the assumption that Paul knew nothing of a supernatural birth, to reconcile his doctrines concerning human sin with the sinlessness of Jesus left out.[22]

It is not necessary, however, to enter here upon the theories of the theologians in regard to the origin of sin or of inherited depravity, which are for the modern mind dead issues, as once stated in Church formulas. It is enough to say that while psychology repudiates these older theories of total depravity by inheritance, it does admit the undeniable presence of depraved tendencies in human nature, which is in agreement with the Pauline doctrine, rightly interpreted. Students of ethnology testify to the transmission of physical, mental and moral characteristics of families, nations and races from generation to generation, just as the apostle, when he surveys the whole history of the human race, ignores all racial distinctions between Jew and Gentile and traces the universal corruption back to its fountainhead in the first man Adam, with whom

[22] II Cor. v. 21.

began this process of transmitting depraved tendencies to posterity.

If Jesus was human like the rest of us, it is a postulate of reason that He must of necessity have inherited this sinwardness, this inbred bias or tendency toward sin which inheres, according to St. Paul, also, in human nature and is derived in its beginnings from Adam. If Jesus inherited this propensity to evil through a human father and mother, that would raise the question, how could He be the essentially Holy, the Sinless One, capable of redeeming humanity from the depraved tendencies which were inbred in his own nature? Was there any way that He could avoid this inheritance? How? This is the vital question. Holding that He was human like the rest of us definitely puts the stamp of inconsistency on the apostle's argument asserting the universality of sin and at the same time the sinless character of the human Jesus. For, if knowledge of the virgin birth did not lie in the background of his thinking, nor any assumption that this mode of Christ's entrance into the world was also known to the Christians to whom he was writing so that they would readily agree with him in exempting Jesus from inherited sin, it is incomprehensible that a man of Paul's intellectual power and controversial ability should have overlooked this wide gap in his reasoning.

Undeniably, on the above supposition, this inconsistency is there. Modern science sees no way by which a human being who enters this world like the rest of us can do so without inheriting the tendencies or qualities belonging to fallen human nature, nor does Paul, as is evidenced by his assertion of the universal inbred moral corruption of humanity, but he offers no explanation of Christ's exemption.

It is quite interesting to review the laborious attempts often made by various authors who wrestle with this

Pauline problem. Some boldly deny the sinlessness of Jesus. Others deny his birth from a virgin, but endeavor to account for his sinless character by attributing to Him an extraordinary endowment of spiritual energy, by means of the Holy Spirit, which freed Him from thralldom to any sinful impulse in his human nature. But how futile are all such efforts to rule out the miraculous and to prove that Paul had no knowledge of the birth from a virgin is almost self-evident. If we deny, on the one hand, that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, as stated by Matthew and Luke, but claim, on the other, that while He was born like the rest of us the Holy Spirit excluded all outbreaks of sinwardness in his nature from the beginning of his being, such suicidal reasoning does not even accomplish its aim of ruling out the miraculous. It only substitutes a contradiction for it, by which heredity through the human parent is acknowledged but at the same time that same heredity is checkmated by the Holy Spirit!

If the argument be urged that according to the apostle's statement Christ did not come in the sameness, but in the "likeness of sinful flesh," thereby in the thought of the apostle implying a difference between Christ's nature and the nature of other men, this would only put the difficulty off without solving it, for the question would still remain, How did Jesus obtain the *"likeness"* and yet avoid this *sameness?* It is certain He did not obtain the "likeness" from his parents, Joseph and Mary, for they had the *same* fallen nature as others of Adam's race and could not transmit what they did not possess. Nor is it conceivable that the other children of Joseph and Mary also escaped the impress of the laws of heredity. A study of the progenitors in the genealogy of Jesus precludes any way out of this predicament through the laws of atavism.

The renowned Beyschlag, Professor of Theology at Halle, says: "There was a quality inherent in the pneuma

[Spirit] of Jesus which established his individuality; a holy energy that excluded from the first that sinful predominance of the *sar* [flesh] which is in all other men the basis of sinfulness."[23] Naturally, however, the question again arises, if the earthly parents themselves of Jesus inherit this basis, when and whence did Jesus derive the "holy energy" which excluded or expelled this "basis of sinfulness" from his nature?

Bernhard Weiss, Professor of Theology in Berlin, surrenders to the difficulty: "Whether Paul has considered how this sinfulness of Christ during his earthly life is compatible with his doctrine of the power of sin having, through Adam's transgression, obtained dominion in the whole human race, cannot be ascertained." As an explanation this does not help us out much, for whether Paul considered that problem or not, he was well aware that Jesus had a mother of the seed of David, and the difficulty of reconciling the two definitely opposing statements of the apostle under discussion is still there. The fact that Paul himself makes no attempt to dispose of the inconsistency, and acts as if none existed, would only add to the dilemma.

Stevens, of Yale University, who is of the opinion that Paul was not acquainted with the tradition of the supernatural birth, says:

> When we consider his doctrine of the universal sinfulness of mankind as descended from Adam with his affirmation of the sinfulness of Jesus, the preternatural origin of his humanity seems to supply the only means of explaining and harmonizing these two facts, both of which he so explicitly asserts; we can only say, that although there is no evidence that Paul reflected upon the problem it is certain that he not

[23] *New Testament Theology*, Vol. II, p. 69.

> only affirms nothing which is inconsistent with the supernatural conception, but that on no other supposition can his statements of Christ's sinlessness, on the one hand, and universal sinfulness, on the other, be so well explained and harmonized."[25]

This is very nearly equivalent to an admission that the apostle did have knowledge of the belief in the Jerusalem Church that Jesus was born of a virgin. For if Paul had not reflected upon the problem or had not found in the supernatural character of Jesus' birth the key to its solution, he would have bequeathed to posterity a conundrum which demanded an answer but to which no answer could be given.

And is it not rather singular that if the birth of Jesus from a virgin never occurred, or if Paul had no knowledge of it either as a common rumor, a theory or a myth, that two diametrically opposed principles of such tremendous import to history and religion should find their explanation and reconciliation only in the supernatural character of an event which it is said never occurred?

While it would be presumptuous to attempt to declare the whole mind of the apostle, it is absolutely certain (1) that he knew Christ was born of a woman, and (2) that He was without sin. If Paul did not pause to fill up all the gaps in his argument or to explain how this latter could be so without overthrowing his other doctrine of the inbred depraved tendencies of the race, the explanation probably is that the emphasis of his thought was upon the existence of the contrast between the *earthly* Adam and the *heavenly* Jesus, the one the cause of sin, the other the Redeemer from sin. Those to whom the apostle wrote were already Christians and therefore so well instructed in the "how" of the sinlessness of Jesus that they

[24] *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. II, p. 405.
[25] *The Pauline Theology*, p. 212.

were able also to understand the theological reasoning of the apostle in regard to the "why" of it, which seems not altogether to be the case with some Bible readers of the present day. They had access to the same Greek Bible prophesying the Christ as Paul, and they were in possession of the oral teachings of the disciples who had migrated everywhere from the primitive community in Jerusalem.

This also may be said that, whatever the form of compatibility between them in the mind of the apostle, the incompatibility pointed out in his conflicting statements of universal sin and the sinlessness of Jesus still exists. Those who dispute his birth from a virgin have no alternative in settling that conflict but to adopt the teaching of those who deny the sinless character of Christ and affirm his personal share in the evil inheritance of humanity.

That there is a solution of the problem not based upon a choice between the two, and that this solution rests upon sound inferences from what is involved in the birth of Jesus from a virgin and *nowhere else,* seems to be a necessary conclusion from the data given in the narrative of Luke, in which the causal agent of Christ's human nature is affirmed to be the creative Spirit of God to the exclusion of all other agencies.

> He shall be called great and shall be called the Son of God: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of his father David. . . . Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee, therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.[26]

[26] Luke i. 31-35.

No companion to this path of entrance into human life is suggested in any divinely announced nativity in the Old Testament. Of the birth of John the Baptist, for instance, it is simply stated that "he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb," which differs in meaning from the birth ascribed to Jesus, as the act instituting natural law is distinct from cases of the operation of natural law in the ordinary course of nature. This child to be who shall be "holy" from the beginning is the direct handiwork and not the product at one remove of the Holy Spirit, and entitled, therefore, in a special manner to be called the Son of God. His human nature is to include all the capabilities belonging to the perfectly human. But sin, according to Scripture, is no essential characteristic or native element in human nature. It is an acquired characteristic of human nature. Sin is an invasion acquiesced in by a free act of will. It is a foreign element that has crept in, and not an original constituent of human nature. It is not a necessary ingredient of manhood. The less power sin has over anyone, not the less, but the more, human does he become in terms of the primal constitution of man as God created him.

In assuming human nature, therefore, the human nature which the Son of God took upon himself was not a morally tainted and enfeebled nature, but a human nature undefiled and in possession of all the faculties and capabilities belonging to its genus before it was outraged by the corrupting effect of evil. Heredity had not put its finger upon it. Every entail of sin was annulled by the power of God, and a morally perfect human being entered into the historic life of humanity, passed through all the experiences of the race, "was in all points tempted as we are," and ended as He began, without sin. Where Adam fell, Jesus stood. His nature was fully human, i. e., not gifted with an incapacity for sin, but it proved equal to

the resistance required not to sin. Alongside its vulnerability to temptation was also a sin-proof veto power over it. As a perfectly healthy athlete might go down among a plague-stricken, weak and crippled mass of humanity without fear of contagion and radiating healthfulness by reason of his abundant life, so Christ Jesus entered out common life as the Sinless One, the Healer, the Redeemer, the Miracle of History—for a sinless individual joining a sinful race is as great a miracle as a resurrection from the dead.

We may now properly turn to inquire, Did the apostle John know of the birth of Jesus from a virgin? It would be hard to understand, indeed, how it could be that he did not. His mother was kinswoman of Mary, the mother of Jesus. When Jesus was dying He committed his mother to the loving care of John, "And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home."[27] Mary had lived in the home of her sister, Salome,[28] John's mother, and it may be taken for granted that John learned all that there was to know from his mother.

It is not necessary to set store by the doubtful argument of some critics in regard to the correct form of the text of John i. 13. For the text, "which were born," they[29] would substitute "who was born," and apply the passage to Jesus. Probably much may be said in favor of this suggested correction. But leaving these questions of textual criticism aside, we are on firm ground in asserting that John also knew what the Church in Jerusalem knew. We may say with Zahn: "As is proved by the prologue of John and the birth stories of Matthew and Luke, at the time[30] when all the Gospels were written it was commonly

[27] John ix. 27. John must have moved from Capernaum to Jerusalem for, according to Acts, we find him there in all the early days of the Church.

[28] See Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, Vol. III, p. 187, and note 20.

[29] Notably Professor Blass, *Philosophy of the Gospel*.

[30] It is only fair to note that Zahn fixes a later date for these Gospels than does Harnack.

believed by the Church that Jesus was not the son of Joseph; but neither John nor the Synoptics make this a part of the teaching of Jesus."[31]

Taking our stand again on undebatable ground, we maintain that *John had Luke's Gospel before him when he wrote his own.* "John corrects Luke," says Dr. Moffatt. "Both have remarkable common elements in their vocabulary. . . . In one class of passages some special trait of Luke has been adopted and adapted by the fourth evangelist."[32]

Numerous illustrations in the text of both Gospels are given in support of these statements. It is quite true that Dr. Moffatt is not convinced that John the apostle was the author of the Fourth Gospel. If John was not its author, it might be inferred that no conclusion can be drawn from anything in the Fourth Gospel that he personally knew anything about a belief in the Church concerning the virgin birth. This argument, however, cuts both ways, for if John was not the author of the Fourth Gospel, then no conclusion can be drawn against belief in the virgin birth from its silence concerning it. The consensus of critical opinion, however, is that John the Apostle, and not John the Presbyter (if such a person ever really lived) did write the Fourth Gospel. The right conclusion to draw here also, therefore, must be that, since John had the Synoptic Gospels before him when he wrote his own, he must have known of the birth of Jesus from a virgin, because the Gospels of Matthew and Luke both contain accounts of it. There can be no doubt that he knew the contents of the Gospels he was using in writing his own.

The two prior fundamental questions which go to the

[31] *Introduction to the New Testament*, Vol. III, p. 311.
[32] *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, p. 535.

roots of the problem of the silence of Paul concerning the birth of Jesus from a virgin: What was the belief of the primitive Church in Jerusalem? and Did Paul know of this belief? have now been, we think, answered. And the conclusion we have reached is that Paul did have full knowledge of the birth of Jesus from a virgin, whatever the reasons may have been for his silence concerning it.

CHAPTER VI

Final Evidence

In the foregoing pages evidence and inference have been employed to show that the narratives of the birth of our Lord from a virgin originated in Jewish-Christian circles; that opportunity was not lacking to share in the knowledge of Mary, the mother of Jesus; that this chapter of his biography could not have been a myth invented by Gentile-Christians, since the sources of the narrative in Luke's Gospel are earlier in date than the preaching of the Gospel among the Gentiles; that it could not have been the result of an erroneous interpretation of, and pious reflection upon, Isaiah vii. 14, since a matter requiring explanation comes first and explanation follows. We have shown how extremely unlikely it is that the narratives in Matthew and Luke could have been interpolations; that belief in his birth from a virgin was held by the primitive Church; and that Paul himself must have been acquainted with that faith. The facts show that he associated intimately with those who accepted it in full, and thus acquired a comprehensive knowledge of the faith held in the primitive Church in Jerusalem.

It may appear to some minds, however, that the evidence thus far adduced to establish Paul's knowledge of this belief is not yet entirely conclusive. Therefore, we will present fresh lines of proof based on the fact, for which Harnack is authority, that the Gospel of Luke "was written while Paul was still alive."

First, then, what proof or evidence amounting to a moral certainty is there that Paul ever saw that Gospel?

In the previous chapter note was taken that the Epistle to the Colossians and the Epistle to Philemon indicate that Luke and Mark were both in Rome at the same time with Paul and some time after the Gospels of both these evangelists had been written. Is it not certain that copies of them would be in the possession of these evangelists in Rome and opportunity be given to Paul to read them? Aside from the inevitable answer which we would give to that question, it is clearly evident from Paul's Epistles themselves that he was familiar with the contents of Luke's Gospel long before his meeting with Luke and Mark in Rome. There is nothing remarkable in this. Luke was the apostle's traveling companion; and it would be most natural and commonplace for Luke to inform him of the progress of his work from time to time as it grew under his hand.

Now, it is a well understood principle that, when two writers on the same subject use identical terms in expressing the same ideas, either one of them is copying the other or both are copying from a third document. For example, in the Epistle of Barnabas we read that Jesus "came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Plainly the author of that Epistle copied that sentence from Matthew ix. 13, Mark xi. 17 or Luke v. 32. This same Epistle contains the statement, "many are called but few are chosen." By comparing the Greek of the Epistle word for word with the Greek of Matthew's Gospel (xxii. 14) we find them to be alike, with the exception of one word (understood in the Epistle), and the conclusion follows that Barnabas is copying here from Matthew's Gospel.

The similar cases found when the Epistles of Clement and Polycarp are compared with Paul's Epistles leave no possible ground for doubt that both Clement and Polycarp

quoted from the great apostle. Thus, compare Clement with the Epistles to the Romans and the Ephesians.

Clem. 35. Casting off from us all unrighteousness and iniquity, covetousness, strifes, malignities, and deceits, whisperings and backbitings, hatred of God, pride and arrogance, vainglory and inhospitality. For they that do these things are hateful to God; and not only they that do them, but they also that consent unto them.	Rom. i. 29-32. Being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, hateful to God, insolent, haughty, boastful. . . . who, knowing the ordinance of God, that they which practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but also consent with them that practice them.
Clem. 36. Through Him our foolish and darkened mind springeth up into light.	Rom. i. 21. Their foolish heart was darkened.
Clem. 46. Wherefore do we tear and rend asunder the members of Christ and stir up factions against our own body and . . . forget that we are members one of another?	Rom. xii. 5. So we, who are many are one body in Christ and severally members one of another. Also Eph. iv. 25. We are members one of another.
Clem. 38. Let each man be subject unto his neighbor.	Eph. v. 21. Subjecting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ.
Clem. 46. Have we not one God and one Christ and Spirit of grace that was shed upon us? And is there not one calling in Christ?	Eph. iv. 3-6. There is one body and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.
Clem. 46. God . . . who chose the Lord Jesus Christ, and us through him for a peculiar people.	Eph. i. 4. He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love.

Compare also the following from Polycarp to the Philippians:

Poly. 3. . . . Love toward God and Christ and toward our neighbor. For if any man be occupied with these, he hath fulfilled the commandment of righteousness; for he that hath love is far from all sin.	Rom. xiii. 9, 10. If there be any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law.
Poly. 6. We must all stand at the judgment seat of Christ, and each man give an account of himself.	Rom. xiv. 10, 12. We shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. . . . So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God. Also II Cor. v. 10. For we must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ.
Poly. 5. Neither fornicators, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men shall inherit the kingdom of God.	I Cor. vi. 9, 10. Neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men . . . shall inherit the kingdom of God.
Poly. 2. Now he who raised up him from the dead will raise us up also.	II Cor. iv. 14. He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also.
Poly. 6. Taking thought always for what is honorable in the sight of God and men.	II Cor. viii. 21. We take thought for things honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. Also Rom. x. 17. Take thought for things honorable in the sight of all men.
Poly. 3. Edified in the faith given to you, which is the mother of us all.	Gal. iv. 26. Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.
Poly. 5. Knowing, then, that God is not mocked.	Gal. vi. 7. Be not deceived; God is not mocked.

Poly. 12. Who shall believe on our Lord and God Jesus Christ, and his Father, who raised him from the dead.	Gal. i. 1. Through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead. Also Col. ii. 12.
Poly. 1. Ye know that it is by grace ye are saved; not of works, but by the will of God, through Jesus Christ.	Eph. ii. 8, 9. For by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works.
Poly. 4. Let us arm ourselves with the armor of righteousness.	Eph. vi. 13, 14. Take up the whole armor of God . . . having put on the breastplate of righteousness. Also II Cor. vi. 7.
Poly. 10. Be ye all subject one to another.	Eph. v. 21. Subjecting yourselves one to another.

This assemblage of word for word agreements render the conclusion indisputable that both Clement and Polycarp had read the Epistles of St. Paul.

Close search has brought to light parallels of thought and language between certain of the Epistles in the New Testament, as for instance between I Peter and James. So exact are these as to convince critical readers that Peter was well acquainted with the Epistle to the Ephesians. And we know also that Peter thought Paul had written "some things hard to be understood," which is clear evidence that he had read some of Paul's writings. Let any one versed in Greek compare the Epistle of Jude with II Peter and explain if he can the numerous similarities in these Epistles upon any other basis than that one is dependent upon the other.

The critical investigator who has no interest to serve save to get at the truth will not object to the use of this principle in the present study. Apply it to Luke's Gospel and the Pauline Epistles and it will compel an acceptance of the conclusion that Paul was well acquainted with Luke's Gospel, and, therefore, that he did know of the

birth of Jesus from a virgin narrated in that Gospel. The similarities of thought, word and structure are in part as follows:

Luke iv. 22. And wondered at the gracious words.	Col. iv. 6. Let your speech be alway with grace.

A closer translation of what the apostle really writes would read, "Let your speech always be *gracious.*" The hearers of our Lord wondered at the *graciousness* of his words, that is, his teaching. Had Paul never met this antithesis to John the Baptist's brusqueness in Luke, would he have passed on to the Christians at Colossae this advice to imitate our Lord's gentler manner? How otherwise shall we account for this striking similarity? Expressing the same thought in the same words ceases to be a mere coincidence after a few repetitions such as these:

Luke iv. 32. And they were astonished at his doctrine for his word was with power.	I Cor. ii. 4. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration and of power.

Here the similarity is one of thought and structure "doctrine," "preaching," "words of power," "power"—exactly the same ideas and relationships in both passages.

Luke vi. 36. Be ye therefore merciful as your Father also is merciful.	II Cor. i. 3. The Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.

Luke uses a particular Greek word for "merciful" here and uses it only this once in his Gospel. Paul, also, departs from common usage and employs this same term. The difference might be expressed in English by the terms, merciful and pitiful.

This word of Luke signifies "to pity," "to take compassion" accompanied by an active desire to relieve the trouble. The commoner synonyms were less intensive

in meaning. Why, then, was not one of the synonyms which are very common in the New Testament used in this particular text? And how does it happen that the only time Luke used "pitiful" as a predicate of the character of God, Paul should choose out of all other words signifying mercy, pity, compassion just this identical word in the same connection? Would he be likely to, if he had never heard of this saying of our Lord recorded in Luke?

Luke x. 8. Eat such things as *are set* before you.	I Cor. x. 27. Whatsoever *is set* before you, eat.

Here, again, both writers use identical words to express identical ideas. Here, too, there are quite a number of synonyms of the phrase "to set before one," which Paul might have used. Luke employs the verb "to set before" four times in his Gospel and once in Acts xvi. 34. Mark also uses the same verb three times.

Luke x. 21. Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent.	I Cor. i. 19. I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to naught the understanding of the prudent.

Our Lord evidently states here as an accomplished fact what had been prophesied in Isaiah xxix. 14 would come to pass when God should do a marvelous work among the people. It will be noticed that the meaning of the Hebrew word for "hid" in Isaiah is retained by Luke, but that Paul departs from both the Hebrew and the LXX and substitutes another verb, "bring to naught." No claim is made that there is direct evidence here that Paul is using Luke, but there is more than a passing suggestion that the one verse is an echo of the other.

Luke xii. 42. Who then is that faithful and wise steward?	I Cor. iv. 2. It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.

Our Lord is speaking of the faithful steward to whom the care or oversight of his household shall be committed. The reference in Corinthians is reminiscent, as if Paul was taking his duty to heart as a steward of the mysteries of God and reminding himself that he must be faithful "to his trust."

Luke vi. 39. Can the blind lead the blind?	Rom. ii. 19. And art confident that thou thyself art a guide to the blind.

A number of verbs in Greek signify "to lead," but the one here chosen by Luke is rare in the New Testament, and the corresponding form of the noun which Paul uses for "guide" is equally rare. It is only found, indeed, in Matthew xv. 14, xxiii. 16-24 and Acts i. 16.

Luke xxi. 24. Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.	Rom. ii. 25. Blindness in part hath happened unto Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.

Where else could Paul obtain this exact idea of the "fullness of the Gentiles," which is so clearly but an echo of the words of the Lord, than from Luke's Gospel? For this prophecy does not occur elsewhere in this form. To the reader of the Greek text, Paul's language almost suggests literal copying from Luke. Another passage which seems to be reflected in Paul's letter to the Colossians is:

Luke viii. 15. Keep it [the word] and bring forth fruit with patience.	Col. i. 10, 11. Being fruitful . . . strengthened with all might . . . unto all patience and long suffering.

Although a sufficient number of similarities of thought and expression have now been presented to prove that Paul

was acquainted with the text of Luke's Gospel, one more will be cited:

Luke xi. 47-49. Ye build the sepulchers of *the prophets* and your fathers *killed them.* . . . . I will send them prophets and apostles and some of them they shall slay and *persecute.*	I Thess. xi. 15. Who both *killed* the Lord Jesus, and *their own prophets,* and have *persecuted us.*

How explain this conjunction of ideas otherwise than that the one passage is based on the other? Add now the fact that there are about one hundred words in the New Testament which are used only by Paul and Luke, and it would seem that the proof is well-nigh complete that Paul was acquainted with Luke's Gospel. We have produced unquestionable evidence that Barnabas quoted Matthew and that Clement and Polycarp quoted from the Pauline Epistles. Evidence of the same order now lies before us in the case of the Gospel of Luke and certain Epistles of St. Paul. If the evidence in the cases of Clement and Polycarp compels us to believe that these writers quoted from the apostle, this identical rule of evidence must force us to believe that Paul quoted from or was familiar with the contents of the Gospel of Luke. From this conclusion there is no escape. The same rule applies to all such instances, or it does not apply to any. But if Paul was acquainted with Luke's Gospel, then Paul must have had knowledge of the birth of Jesus from a virgin, for it is with the narrative of that birth that Luke begins his Gospel.[1]

[1] It would be exceedingly interesting to present here from a French source further confirmation of the contention that Paul knew the teaching of Jesus, even his very words. We can only refer to the valuable work, *L'apôtre Paul et Jéus Christ,* by Maurice Goguel, pp. 75-95.

CHAPTER VII

Why Was Paul Silent?

The logic of reason demands completeness. A beautiful statue, a finished poem or a piece of genuine oratory is a "thing of beauty and a joy forever" because of the satisfaction it gives to the desire for perfection. But a broken column, a headless bust or a "lame and impotent conclusion" to a firmly wrought argument is a disappointment both to reason and the artistic sense.

This leads us to suspect that it may not be satisfactory to close the argument here without an attempt to answer in some way the additional question, Why was Paul silent concerning the birth of Jesus from a virgin? A similar situation confronts us in the case of other New Testament writers, Peter, John, Jude and James, since the extraordinary and altogether disconcerting result of all the labor of critical examination is the conclusion that those disciples of the Lord who must have known the facts as well, or better, than anyone else give no certain word of testimony for or against the historical statements of Matthew and Luke concerning the birth of Jesus.

It is no solution of the question at all to affirm, as many do, that the reason these New Testament writers were silent is that the story of the birth of Jesus from a virgin was not known to the early Church. The evidence reviewed here bars that way out. If, contrary to all that evidence, that assumption should be granted, still it cannot be denied that these writers were acquainted with the indubitable fact that both Matthew and Luke had related the circumstances of the birth in their Gospels and that these Gospels were known and read in the Church. The

apostle John, who knew and had made use of Luke's Gospel,[1] did not deny, correct or modify any statement Luke had written. It is not likely that an apostle who had in his Epistles so sternly denounced other errors in regard to the true nature of Christ would, when writing his Gospel, have permitted by his silence a glaringly false statement concerning the incarnate Word to go to the whole Church. Must it also be assumed, rather than give up a prized theory, that neither Peter nor Jude nor James ever heard of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke?

To assign with assurance any good reason for the silence of St. Paul concerning the birth of Jesus from a virgin is impossible. Paul himself has not spoken. And none of the apostles has spoken for him. Neither Luke, nor Barnabas, nor Sylvanus, nor Aristarchus, nor any of the other companions of the apostles has suggested a reason. No tradition nor documentary fragment coming down from the ancient Church gives us any clew. We simply do not know. As Grote in the Preface to his *History of Greece* says, "Conscious and confessed ignorance is a better state of mind than the fancy, without the reality of knowledge." The question, therefore, is open to conjecture, and out of any number of plausible reasons which invention may suggest we are free to select that one which seems to be the most probable. One thing only is certain. In the absence of any proof in favor, and much to the contrary, we are not at liberty to assume that the reason for Paul's silence was ignorance. In the face of the facts previously presented, that assumption is not permissible.

After all, may it not be that the negative inferences from Paul's silence exaggerate it out of all proportion to its importance? Polemical necessities and the bias of unbelief, as well as the prejudice of ignorance, sometimes

[1] On the relation of John's Gospel to the Synoptists, see Moffatt, *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament.*

magnify the accidental, and even the trivial, to vast proportions. It is characteristic of a certain type of mind to make mountains out of molehills. Elaborate theories have been spun with infinite skill from the small cocoon of single texts.

It is not likely that Paul had any particular reason at all for his silence in regard to the birth of Jesus from a virgin. It may never have occurred to him that his silence would ever raise any question in the Church, for the very simple reason that the mode of birth of our Lord was not related to nor did it fit into any of the subjects he was writing about to his recently organized churches.

In a study of this question it should be kept in mind that the early churches were not established by means of the written Gospels, but through the oral preachings of the apostles. Not until several years after the churches had been organized could the written Gospels have been used as textbooks for catechetical instruction. The Gospel of Luke was sent to a convert, the excellent Theophilus, who had already been "instructed" in the historical material of the new religion before he had ever seen a written Gospel, except perhaps one of those inadequate booklets written by the "many" to whom Luke refers in his Preface. The apostolic Epistles themselves were not known in all the churches at the same time. Paul was acquainted with the Gospel Luke had written and also with that of Mark, but it does not follow that at this time Luke's Gospel was known and read in all the churches which the apostles had founded.

That the historical facts in the life of Jesus of which they were witnesses was the basis of this preaching is everywhere evident in the Book of Acts. Examples of these historical discourses, mere outlines, of course, are the preaching of Peter before Cornelius[2] and the discourse of

[2] Acts x. 37-4.

Paul in the Synagogue at Antioch.[3] But the one outstanding fact given prominence in all the apostolic preaching was the resurrection of Jesus. There was little time for narrating and explaining every detail of the Redeemer's life, especially those connected with his birth, childhood and youth, for they had no vital and immediate relation to the supreme fact of human redemption through Christ Jesus.

Paul was a missionary and his themes were missionary themes. His mind was occupied with great theologies like sin, atonement, world-redemption, conscious fellowship with Christ, Christian conduct in a pagan environment. These were his subjects. There was no more occasion for him to introduce the mode of Jesus' birth into his discourses upon these subjects than there was for Peter to do so in his general epistle on Christian duties, or for Jude in his exhortation to steadfastness in the faith, or for James in his discussion of faith and good works.

At what point could Paul have introduced the mode of Jesus' birth into his Epistles with any relevancy to the particular subject he was discussing? His Epistles are before us and we may try to choose a spot where such a reference would fit in, if we will. Let the experiment be tried then. Even literary critics, experts in the art of detecting interpolations, or in the reconstruction of texts, will find it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible—provided they are fair to the apostle—to introduce the mode of Jesus' birth into the argument of any of his Epistles without arresting the thought of the apostle, or inserting an irrelevant digression, or rearranging his ideas, or forcing to the front a discussion of a subject for which no occasion whatever had arisen in any of the churches to which he was writing.

In all the Epistles of Paul there seem to be two places only where the context furnishes opportunity for specific

[3] *Ibid.*, xiii. 23-31.

mention of our Lord's birth from a virgin. These two passages are Romans i. 3, 4 and Galatians iv. 4. The first reads: *"Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh. And declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead."*

In this quotation the apostle asserts the human and the divine nature of Jesus our Lord. He is teaching, and his instruction is that, while Jesus was a human resident of earth, the divine in Him was the preexistent Son of God, which fact was later demonstrated by his resurrection from the dead. This is the exact thought which the apostle evidently wishes to convey. Let us try now to show how the apostle might mention specifically here the fact of a virgin birth, and let the text be made to read: *"Who was born of a virgin according to the flesh and declared to be the Son of God with power,"* etc. The question then immediately arises: Just how does this specific reference to the fact of the birth of Jesus from a virgin strengthen the argument here for the *reality* of the *human nature* of our Lord? The antithesis sought to be emphasized is the human over against his divine nature. Paul asserts the reality of both, and therefore the only purpose that introducing the supernatural birth of Jesus from a "virgin" would serve is to cloud his statement of the real humanity of Jesus, confuse the issue and suggest a Docetic view of our Lord's human nature. The apostle avoids this difficulty by declaring that Jesus was "born of the seed of David," purposely omitting reference to an earthly father which we should expect him to mention in antithesis to the divine Father in the context, *if there had been an earthly father.* Any similar attempt elsewhere will only reveal the more clearly, as the experiment will prove, that we cannot interpolate the birth of Jesus from a virgin into Paul's sentences without essentially changing the exact

thought or shade of meaning the apostle had at the moment in mind.

For instance, take the Galatian text. This reads: *"But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman under the law,* etc." Paul could have written made of *"earthly parents,"* were such the fact according to his understanding, but nowhere does he ever suggest such an idea. What he did write was that God, as the *causal* agent, *sent* his Son into the world, being delivered of a "woman." Now, for "woman" let us substitute "virgin," as it is plausible to suppose that Paul would have done had he known of the birth of Jesus from a virgin. The reason becomes apparent at once why this change will not do, because the fact that Jesus was made or born of a "virgin" is of little or no use in establishing the position that He was made "under the law," and this relation to the law is the specific idea which Paul wishes here to express. Why refer, then, at all in this connection to his birth from a "virgin"? Would the statement that Jesus was "made of a virgin" help put Him in the thought of the Galatians more clearly and actually under the jurisdiction of the Mosaic Law, and therefore more "like unto his brethren"? Paul here declares the preexistence of the Holy One by his use of the term "sent," but, as in Romans i. 3-4, he wants also to declare the reality of the humanity of Jesus with which the preexistent Son was united, and this he does by declaring that Jesus was born of a "woman."

It seems probable, then, that reference to the birth of Jesus from a virgin could not have been introduced without interfering with the great themes he was discussing.

The explanation thus given is not completely satisfactory, and the demand for a more convincing reason may still linger in many minds. Happily, we are not shut up to this one line of explanation, though it should receive

full weight in any consideration of the subject. If, therefore, we felt forced to deal in conjecture, too, we would venture to suggest that, if the apostle had any reason at all for his consistent silence on the subject of the birth of Jesus from a virgin, it was a *prudential reason.*

Christianity was an absolutely new religion. It came into a world already grown old in sin, into a world alien to it in thought, in speech, in belief and life and view of the universe. The moral darkness of milleniums had so blinded the spiritual perception in the men of that world that, when the pure and holy truths of Christianity were announced, they aroused antagonism on the ground that they were unphilosophical, contrary to human nature and inimical to the stability of the State. The Supreme God was either neglected or was lost among multitudes of deities. In every nation gods and goddesses, born of fear, or of poetic imaginings, or of human depravity, the outcome of blind philosophies or of obscene cults—a consequence of the blending of Grecian art and culture with Asiatic mysticism—chaotically mingled in the religious thought and daily life of the people. Especially in the Greco-Roman Empire was it true that, the more deeply the inner life, the social habits and religious customs of the people became saturated with these legends of the gods and these stories of mythical heroes descended from the gods, the less susceptible and responsive the people became to even the faint glimmerings of truth shining here and there in the moral teaching of their philosophers. Philosophy had lost its moral power. In the very age in which Christianity appeared, Strabo, the geographer, as cited by Neander, tells us that "The great mass of the inhabitants of the cities are excited to good by means of agreeable fables, when they hear the poets narrating in a fabulous manner the deeds of heroes; such as, for instance, the labors of Hercules or Theseus, or the honors bestowed on men

by the gods . . . for the great mass of women and the promiscuous multitudes of people cannot be led to piety by philosophical reasoning, but for that purpose superstition is requisite, which cannot be supported without miraculous stories and prodigies."

Every nation had its own gods, legends and customs, but in the migrations of the various peoples from one country or locality to another these had migrated, also, to other peoples, and under new names and similar forms of worship became domiciled among them.[4] In this manner the moral conceptions associated in one religion after another with the worship of its gods also spread to other nations. The worship of Isis in Egypt became for a while established in Rome, notwithstanding the laws enacted against the introduction of foreign deities and modes of worship.[5] The vilest characters which pornographic poets revelling in lubricity could conceive were attributed to these divine beings, and, notwithstanding the effort of the philosophers to interpret these erotic descriptions as symbolical of natural phenomena, corrupt humanity found it easier to follow the examples of the gods than to understand the interpretations of the philosophers.[6] Fallen human nature is ever inclined to follow the line of least resistance. Long before Paul wrote the seventh chapter of Romans, Ovid, a Roman poet, had uttered the cry, "I know and approve the better way, but follow the worse."

With what withering sarcasm does the Christian apologist of that day expose the frightful immoralities of these mythical deities and divine heroes! Neptune soiled the

[4] See Virgil. "Brought his gods to Latium, whence the Latin race," etc. Heroditus tells us, "From the Pelasgians the Hellenes took their gods. But whence each of the gods comes, whether they were always there, what their form is, we Hellenes only know as it were yesterday. For it is Hesiod and Homer in the first place who created for the Greeks their race of gods, who gave the gods their names, distributed honors and arts among them and described their forms.

[5] See Leckey, *History of European Morals*, Vol. I, p. 263, Note; also Mommsen, *History of Rome*, Bk. III, Chap. XIII.

[6] See Leckey, *History of European Morals*, p. 167.

virgin purity of Amphitrite, Manaloppe and Enymone; Apollo desired Arsinoe, Sterope and Daphne; Saturn, caught in adultery, changed himself into a beast to escape detection by his heavenly spouse; Jupiter, the "Father of Gods" and men, assumed countless forms in the ardor of his lusts. "Hercules," says the Christian Arnobius, with a wilting sneer, "Hercules, a holy god, violated the daughters of Thestius." Female deities also were guilty of illicit love. Aurora sighed for Tithonius; Venus for Anchius; Tuna for Endymion; Proserpina for Adonis; Ceres for Vulcan, Phaeton and Mars.

Such were the legends and amatory exploits of the immortal gods sung by the poets and wandering minstrels to the multitudes from time immemorial. Embodied in symbol, sanctified by religion and glorified in art, these myths entered so profoundly into the religious, social and political life of the people that today there is scarcely to be found in the excavations of buried cities a single utensil or adornment of public or domestic life—cooking vessel, drinking cup, vase, work of genius in marble or in bronze, broken pedestal, pillar or fragment from house or temple —that does not recall some one of these obscene legends and poetic myths.

This was the world into which Paul carried the holy teachings of Jesus. It was by secession from such a world that the Gentile Churches arose. It was not an easy task, then, as it is not in heathen missions today, in the first generation of these churches to wholly eradicate from memory and imagination the baneful hereditary effects and the acquired habits of a previous life steeped in paganism. The sad reversion to former modes of debauchery, which the apostle in his Epistle to the Church at Corinth so severely condemns and endeavors to remedy, illustrates the tendency among the Gentile-Christians against which he was always on guard, for, judging from his continual

exhortations to constancy in all his correspondence, it was not solely confined to the church at Corinth. Now, it was to just such Christians, men and women but recently rescued from moral darkness, that Paul wrote his immortal epistles.

Quite true, these churches were not composed wholly of converted pagans. Hellenized Jews, who believed in Jesus as the Messiah of God, formed the nucleus of every new Christian community. But they were only a nucleus; the majority were Gentiles. These Gentiles found it hard to shake off the local deities of their respective religions for good, nor, while their will was good to repudiate them, could they wholly free themselves from the spell of the fabulous stories of the old gods. It was common report, which Alexander himself encouraged, that he was not the son of Philip, but of Zeus, who in the form of a serpent visited his mother. The Emperor Augustus was said to have been begotten by the god Apollo while his mother was asleep in the temple. Sir William Ramsay[7] relates that in the ruins of Comana in Pisidia there still lies a milestone with the inscription:

The Emperor Caesar, Son of a god, Pontifex Maximus.

To show how widely extended was the vogue of such beliefs, Deissman[8] says, "Five fragments of marble pedestal from Pergamum bear this inscription, which was put up in honor of Augustus while he was still alive:

The Emperor Caesar, Son of a god, the god Augustus of Every Land and Sea, the Overseer."[9]

In this same work, this distinguished archeologist states that "In an official inscription the town council of Ephesus, in conjunction with other Greek cities in Asia, spoke of Julius Caesar who was their Dictator as 'the God made manifest, offspring of Ares and Aphrodite, and common

[7] *The Church in the Roman Empire.*
[8] *Light from the Ancient East.*
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 348.

savior of human life.' "[10] Plato was said to be the offspring of a god; Hercules was the son of Jupiter and Alamena, daughter of Electrion, King of Argos; Hermione, who married Cadmus and was later translated to the Elysian Fields, was the daughter of Venus and Archises; Aesculapius was the son of Apollo and Coronis—and thus might one continue to cite the popular legends of the birth of distinguished personages, male and female, begotten by gods of mortal mothers.

Would it have been prudent, then, for the apostle Paul in his Epistles to Gentile converts to present to them the story of the birth of Jesus from a virgin, at the risk that they in their ignorance would understand that he meant to say that Jesus was another offspring of a god through a mortal mother? Such a declaration in all probability would not only have added in their minds simply one more to the number of stories of miraculous births of which their former religion was full, but would have also afforded possible grounds for a revival of half-way belief in these pagan legends. Moreover, it would seem to them to reduce the historical facts of the birth of the eternal Son of God to an infamous equality with the transactions recorded in the fables and legends of gods and extraordinary men with which these converts were already too familiar, a possibility to be contemplated with horror.

Not only so, but these recent converts, unlike the Jewish-Christians, had no inherited background of monotheism to restrain them. It would have been easy for them to accept the story of the birth of Jesus from a virgin, since it would have caused no shock to their former beliefs. But all the holy truths of Christianity which Paul had preached would also have suffered debasement by this association of ideas. These truths would all have been vitiated through and through by false conceptions of the Christ,

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 348.

his person and mission, and of the nature of the revelation of God through Him to the human race. No part of the revelation of God can suffer debasement without destroying the purity and divinity of the whole. No religion which gave shelter to fables and legends at the core of it, however moral its maxims or philosophical its reasonings, could have exercised a regenerating influence on the soul of the Gentile world.

Paul was a wise builder. Scholar, thinker, mystic, yet a citizen of the world, no saner head than his sat on the shoulders of any man of that age. All students of his writings are impressed by his tact, his spiritual insight, his clear perception of the necessary relations between cause and effect in the moral progress of men and nations, his lofty conceptions of the Christ and of his significance in human history, his constructive ability in organization and his Christlike tenderness in composing discordant elements. In him were united the zeal of the preacher, the caution of the philosopher, the comprehensive vision of the man of the world, and the clear apprehension of the remedies the world needed with the foresight of the statesman, the raptures of the saint, the courage of the martyr and the courtesy of a gentleman.

Paul was a prudent teacher. He wrote the Corinthians openly that he had fed them with milk as babes must be fed, and not with meat because they could not digest it. It is not likely that he would, nor would we expect him to, go beyond the capacity of his converts, in violation of his own rule of giving to each his meat in due season—of giving milk to babes, and the meat of wisdom to them that are perfected. Prudence in teaching is as necessary as prudence in diet. If, as Sir William Ramsay[11] says, "Paul well knew that there is a time for everything, and that only among those that are full grown should he speak

[11] *The Teaching of St. Paul in the Terms of the Present Day*, p. 109.

philosophy." Again, he says, "Most dangerous as it was to talk philosophically among the Corinthians, a middle-class audience who possessed that half education or quarter education which was worse than a lesser degree of education combined with a greater rustic sympathy with external nature,"[12] how much more impossible it would have been for him to have referred in passing to the birth of Jesus from a virgin in his Epistles to the Corinthians, to the Thessalonians and to the Galatians, respectively—which would not have been easy to do in a sentence—without reviving in the minds of his readers the fables of the gods and leading them to institute comparisons and analogies between the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ and the legends they had repudiated! This reason of prudence may, therefore, lay claim to a certain degree of probability as a reason for the silence of St. Paul on this subject.

Furthermore, had the apostle in his Epistles departed from the specific purpose for which they were written by entering upon a justification of the mode of Christ's entrance into the world—the way was open to him to do so in Romans i. 3, 4, and Galatians iv. 4, 5—he would not only have risked the undesirable consequences among the Gentiles above mentioned, but he would have started another and most serious controversy with the intermeddling Jews with whom he was in ceaseless debate to the day of his death.

> If the proclamation of the supernatural birth (says Allen) would have lowered Christian doctrine in the eyes of the pagan world, so it would have led to debate which would have been distasteful and painful to Christian reverence. At a very early period Jewish caricatures of the story of the supernatural birth were current. They may already under-

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 109.

> lie Mark vi. 3, and more probably are reflected in Matthew i. 15-25. And wherever Christianity spread, Jewish misrepresentation followed it. If the proclamation of the supernatural birth would have encouraged on the one hand a semi-pagan conception of the Messiah, so on the other it would have provoked Jewish slander of the most offensive kind. The silence of St. Paul may well be due partly to his common sense which enabled him to see that there were wise ways and unwise ways of presenting the facts of Christianity to the world (pearls were not to be cast before swine) and partly to that highly developed Christian reverence and modesty which also marks the narratives of the Gospels.[13]

The conclusion reached by this universally acknowledged scholar and commentator on Matthew in this most critical of Commentaries is: "The alleged silence of St. Paul seems, therefore, to be no sufficient argument against the existence of the tradition of the supernatural birth in Palestine during his lifetime."

If so much trouble would have followed the introduction of the subject in the Epistles of St. Paul, why, it may be asked, did not the same trouble follow from the publication of the narratives of the mode of Jesus' birth in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke?

This is a very plausible point to raise. The answer to it, however, is, we believe, complete and in close agreement with the facts. Matthew's Gospel was written for Jewish-Christians. They would be well versed in the writings of the Old Testament; they had always believed in one Holy God of infinite purity, a conception to which no pagan ever attained. Behind these Jewish-Christians were ages of religious history into which at various times and in

[13] Commentary on Matthew.

different ways this one Holy God had previously projected Himself for redemptive purposes. Their Scriptures also had pointed out the coming in a supernatural manner of the Anointed of God who should redeem Israel and be a light unto the Gentiles. These Jewish converts would not have their faith affected injuriously unless they came to share in the Ebionitic heresy concerning the divine nature of Jesus by accepting belief in the agency of the Holy Spirit in the birth of the Messiah Jesus. For standing there before them in their sacred Scriptures were accounts of other divinely influenced births such as those of Samuel and Samson and Gideon, which had occurred in the course of their national history.

Luke wrote his Gospel for the personal instruction of his friend or patron Theophilus. As was the custom of Greek and Roman writers at that time, he addressed him by name at the beginning of his work. Theophilus was a man of education and high social position, as his title "Most Excellent" suggests.[14] Through this nobleman Luke intended to reach the circles of Christians in the fellowship of the Church with whom Theophilus associated. It is very evident, notwithstanding Zahn's labored objection, that this man was a Christian. Indeed, it would be very strange if Luke should associate with such a precious document the name of any man, however excellent, who was not a Christian. Unlike the majority of the mixed multitude who sought salvation in the Church, Theophilus was a man of culture and therefore was more able to weigh and judge critically the narrative of our Lord's birth in the light of the character of the Gospel as a whole, and the life and teaching of Jesus of whom the supernatural birth was affirmed.

As a man of culture, that Preface would deeply impress him by its crystal clearness, seriousness and sincerity. He

[14] See Acts xxiii. 26; xxiv. 25.

would expect in a work so introduced the critical exactness and thoroughness of a competent historian, downright intellectual honesty and the convictions of a man who knew the facts. Expecting such qualities, Theophilus could not but see that this narrative was not another case of the common practice of historians and biographers of exploiting for the populace the supernatural births of extraordinary men. It was too simple and yet too divinely lofty to be classed with such fantasies. It was too pure, too naively innocent, too reticent in its modest revealments, to have been the product of lustful brains. Its heavenly character fitted in too well with the sublime life of Him for whom no birth from a virgin could enhance the spiritual grandeur of his mission. It was too convincing to have been an invention. Theophilus, the man of thought and understanding, must have seen that no necessity could have arisen for the invention of such a birth, since such a life, unparalleled in human history and infinitely superior to that ascribed to the highest gods of the pagan pantheons, was vastly more convincing evidence of the divine character of Jesus than any invented story of a supernatural birth could possibly have been.

Moreover, Theophilus was an instructed Christian. He was grounded in the facts of the Christian faith and would not be confused by fresh reference to the spiritual origin of the Founder of the faith. Luke knows that he had received instruction, for he says: "I write unto thee in order [for the purpose, or intent] most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed," that is, not merely informed, but *catechized*.

Catechetical instruction, common in those days, was "a mouth to mouth" recital of memorabilia concerning Jesus. Luke's account of the birth of our Lord could not, therefore, have been new to Theophilus. It was of

its "certainty" that Luke desired to convince Theophilus, not to impart something wholly new. For this reason Luke goes into details of the facts and is as minute as the critical Theophilus, who wanted to know all the facts "from the beginning," could reasonably desire.

We have now gone over the whole ground of argument in as clear and brief a manner as we are able, to show the the unreasonableness of the assumption that Paul's silence concerning the birth of Jesus from a virgin was due to his ignorance of that birth. To the candid judgment of earnest inquirers, whether or no they are believers in the virgin birth of our divine Lord and Savior, the evidence in the case is now submitted, with the hope that its appeal to reason will strengthen the wavering and firmly establish the faith of those who despite all denials still believe in the veracity of the Gospel concerning Him who was conceived of the Holy Ghost born of the virgin Mary.

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